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Tiger Dick, the Faro King:

OR,

THE CASHIER'S CRIME.

BY PHILIP S. WARNE,

AUTHOR OF "A HARD CROWD," "THE KIDNAPPER," ETC.

PART I—HAND AND GLOVE.

CHAPTER I.

FLORENCE GOLDTHORP'S LOVERS.

The slanting rays of the setting sun are falling in golden lines on a scene of rare enchantment. The horizon is bounded by a range of hills, their forest-plumed crests standing out in bold relief against the amber sky, and a purple haze stealing down their sides where they lie in shadow. Nearer, the broad Mississippi flashes back the sunlight from its bosom, and rising from its banks, the domes and spires of a city appear among the tree-tops. To our left flows a tributary stream, eager to mingle its waters with the parent flood.

Around us lies a garden of rare beauty. Our interest centers in the occupants of a vine-covered bower situated in its midst.

One is a girl in the first blush of her womanhood. Her hands rest in her lap, the fingers interlaced nervously. Her eyes have fallen until the long lashes sweep her cheek. There the color comes and goes with unwonted frequency.

Her companion is a man of some ten or a dozen years her senior, yet still possessed of the freshness and vigor of early manhood. He leans toward her, watching eagerly every changing expression of her countenance, while he speaks rapidly in a tone of pleading.

She raises her eyes to his face with a regretful, compassionate look, and her lips part, as if about to speak.

"Not yet," he says; "do not interrupt me; hear me out. Oh, Florence! I would tell you how, when I first saw you, it was like a bursting of the sun from behind a cloud, illumining my life with a strange, new radiance. Mine had not been a very happy life; there had been more shadow in it than sunshine; but now all the dark past was forgotten in the new brightness that had come into it. It was such happiness to be near you; to catch your smile; to touch your hand. And yet it was so like some delightful dream, I trembled at the prospect of a rude awakening. Did you ever think what would be the emotions of one suddenly endowed with sight after a lifetime of blindness? Can you conceive the trembling, the misgivings with which the strange, new sense would be tried—the scarce belief in its

reality, the shrinking dread of its sudden loss? Oh! how can I tell you of my love?—the alternations of hope and fear—the quick ecstasy, the unreasoning despair—the heaven and the hell, all in a moment! Florence! Florence! has it been a dream—only a dream? Oh! I dare not let you speak, even now. Dear one, you will not blast my hopes—you will not cast me back into the gloom, a thousand times intensified by this momentary brightness! Say, not that you love me now, but that I may hope!"

The girl raised her hand to interrupt the rapid flow of his words, and began:

"Mr. Beaumont, I cannot express to you the pain, the regret, with which—"

"No, no—not that!" he cried, a spasm of agony convulsing his features. "Oh, Florence! you cannot—What can I say to you—how can I tell you? Oh! if you only knew you would not have the heart! I love you! I love you! Pity me! You are all that I have in the world! Your love is my only hope!"

He clung to her hands, as if indeed to a last hope, and lifted to her view a face ghastly in its despair, while his breast labored with great sobs. Sympathetic tears trickled down her cheeks at the utter abandon of the man.

"Calm yourself," she said, soothingly, placing her hand on his shoulder with an almost motherly pity. "Believe me, my heart bleeds for you. It



pains me more than I can tell that I should be the unwitting cause of your misery. I would do anything I could to relieve it."

"Then do not reject me entirely. Give me time. Give me an opportunity to win your love. I shall worship you. My passion will constrain a response for very sympathy. Only let me show you how I can love, how I do love you."

She shook her head.

"I shall always regard you as a very dear friend—as one who has my highest esteem—"

"Conventionalities all!" he cried, with heat. "Do not torture me with meaningless phrases. How ready you are to give that for which I do not ask, and withhold the thing my soul craves! Oh, Florence! may you never know the agony of a moment like this!"

"You have my friendship; I cannot give you more," she said, still gently.

He had let his head fall upon his arm. He now raised it with a sardonic laugh.

"No," he said; "I suppose it is no longer within your control."

She turned back with a hurt, not angry expression.

"Mr. Beaumont!"

"What's the use of glossing over matters?" he cried, recklessly. "No doubt Mr. Frederick Powell, my successful rival—"

Now she arose without a word, anger flashing in her eye and glowing in her cheek, and a tremor of indignation and wounded delicacy running through her frame.

"Ah! that touches the quick?" pursued Beaumont, white with jealous rage. "I wish him joy of his triumph!"

If Florence would have deigned a reply, it was cut short by a crunching step on the gravel walk.

"Speak of angels, and you will hear the rustle of their wings," said Beaumont, with bitter irony; and added, taking his hat and bowing with mock courtesy: "I beg that you will not allow me to interfere with your coming *late-a-late*. Let me bid you good-evening."

And he was gone.

A moment Florence vacillated between conflicting emotions, and then, taking another path, she disappeared amid the shrubbery in the direction of the house.

The arbor had been empty scarcely a moment when it was entered by the man whose approach had interrupted the stormy scene just enacted within it.

"I surely heard voices," he said, with a look of surprise.

Then his glance fell upon a little volume bound in green and gold, lying on the rustic center-table. A look of tenderness came into his eyes as he picked it up and turned over its leaves. It was open at the sad tale of Zolca, in that sweetest, saddest of lover's songs, *Lalla Rookh*.

"Dear girl!" whispered the young man, referring to the absent reader, not to the ill-starred heroine of the poem.

He touched his lips to the leaves, where they had felt the pressure of the fingers he loved so well. And then, as thousands of lovers have done and thousands more will do again, he glanced around with a foolish expression, as if he had feared that some prying eye had detected the silly act.

Entering the house, he placed himself at the piano, and after an airy prelude, began to sing:

"Oh, where dost thou linger
My sweet, pretty maid?
I wait for thy coming
Alone in the glade.
The sound of thy footstep
Falls not on my ear;
The moments that hold thee
Are burdened with fear—
The heavy-winged moments are burdened with fear."

He paused a moment in expectancy. From the conservatory came a response, in clear, bell-like tones:

"Ah! well may the moments
Be heavy with fear;
Unconscious thou waitest
With death lurking near.
Its shadow envelops
The tryst-keeping glade;
Oh, ne'er shalt thou linger
Again for thy maid—
No, nevermore, nevermore wait for thy maid!"

"Talk of romance!" laughed Fred Powell, entering the conservatory as she ceased singing.

Florence stood blushing and smiling as he approached. In her heart there was a shadow of compunction that she could be so happy, when scarcely a moment before a fellow-creature had left her side in such wretchedness. Then came the question, had Fred overheard Beaumont's jealous accusation, and she gazed timidly into his face, to see if she could detect anything confirmatory of the fear; but the frankness of his manner relieved her anxiety, when he added, with a shrug and a grimace:

"But don't you predict a very lugubrious termination to my vigil?"

"Oh, you know we have got past the days of inspiration, and perhaps I am not a true prophetess," she said, slyly pinning a knot of flowers in his buttonhole.

"I hope not—at least in this case," he replied, and taking her arm, led her out into the garden.

The last iris tints of sunset were fading out of the west, and from a sky of deepest azure the moon threw her tranquilizing light over the scene.

Fred and Florence strolled down the garden-path to the arbor. The volume lying on the center-table gave direction to their conversation, and whether influenced by the time, the subject, or by the unconscious attraction of their hearts, their words took a tender tone. Then, with her hands in his and his eyes on her face, Fred asked:

"May I be Feramorz, and will you be my *Lalla Rookh*?"

"What in the world should we do for a *Fadladeen*?" laughed Florence, pretending not to see the drift of his words, though her cheeks were as red as roses and her eyes flashed like diamonds.

"Bother *Fadladeen*!" replied her lover. "I should

want a less carping critic than he. Would you be as partial as the princess?"

"Could you sing as well as the prince?" asked Florence, still evading him.

"My song would draw its inspiration from the same source—my love for you, darling!" he replied, letting his arm go round her in a tremulous embrace. "Now will you be my *Lalla Rookh*; or, better still, will you be my wife?"

Her heart beat against his, her lips touched his neck, as she replied:

"If you are quite sure that you are the true prince, I guess I shall have to say—yes!"

And so was told the old, old story that is ever new.

That evening, when they were exchanging their last words of leave-taking at the gate, Florence clung to his arm with a shade of anxiety in her eyes, as if she were loath to let him go.

"What is it, Flo?" he asked, looking questioningly into her face.

"Nothing—nothing," she replied, glancing wistfully down the moonlit road.

Suddenly, something in the expression of Cecil Beaumont's face, when he left her, appeared before her mind. But, casting aside the vague apprehension, she smiled a farewell to her lover. He bent over her a moment, and was gone, leaving her cheeks a vivid crimson.

Two hours before, the same road had been traversed by Cecil Beaumont; but in a far different mood from that in which Fred Powell now stepped briskly over the ground. The latter went with head erect, chest expanded and limbs swinging free, with a sense of buoyancy and happiness; the head of the former was bowed, his teeth set and hands clenched.

Approaching his boarding-place, Cecil found that Mrs. McPherson was away from home. He passed on into the garden back of the house. Striding back and forth under the trees, he gave vent to his rage and disappointment.

"The only woman I ever loved," he muttered between his teeth, "and to be deprived of her! Then here is this silly fool, May Powell, languishing in my arms. Curse her! her only recommendation is her money."

"Is it thus that the world ever mocks us, thrusting into our laps that for which we care nothing—at which we sicken with disgust—and holding just beyond our grasp that for which we hunger with all the power of passion? Oh, a grand thing is this life! Ha! ha!" laughing bitterly; "how thankful we should be to Providence for its many blessings!"

"But to be beaten by that idiot—that jackanapes, with money in the place of brains—that coxcomb, without an idea beyond the set of his necktie, or the part of his hair! What can she see in him? Oh, curse him! I should like to pitch him neck and heels into a horse-pond!"

"But he shall never marry her—I swear it! I'll kill him first!"

He ground his teeth in a transport of rage, and smote his breast with his clenched hand. Then, with a sudden revolution of feeling, he covered his face with his hands and groaned:

"Oh, Florence! Florence! I love you so! I would give my life for one smile, one pressure of your hand in affection!"

Then changing as suddenly:

"Pugh! I'm a fool! I have the game in my own hands. I'll make him an outcast. She shall blush at the sight of him. The fool is among that class who call themselves 'moderate drinkers'; they 'take a glass now and then, for the sake of good-fellowship.' The idiots think that they can play with the fires of hell and come away unscathed. Ha! ha! I have tried that myself. Experience is a thorough teacher, and brings bitter conviction!"

Thus he railed on, forgetful of everything but his meditated revenge. Mrs. McPherson, on his return home, heard him from her window, and caught the drift of his wild ravings. After he had entered the house and gone up to his room, she heard him pacing backward and forward across the floor, still hurling imprecations at his rival.

CHAPTER II.

AN UNWELCOME ENCOUNTER.

CECIL BEAUMONT sat at his desk, in the bank of which he was cashier. It was five o'clock, and he had the bank all to himself. Before him lay a telegram, and spread out beneath it a Chicago paper, folded down to the grain reports.

Cecil's head rested on his hands, his elbows on the desk. His eyes were fixed, not on the telegram, but away beyond it on vacancy. A painful frown indented his brow, and there was a look of weariness and discouragement on his face.

"It's of no use," he muttered, half aloud; "it's like pouring water on sand. If I put any more money into this infernal speculation, it will be sunk along with the rest, instead of saving it. Luck is dead against me; that's certain. When I put my hand into it, wheat goes down and corn comes up. Well, let it go. I'm tired of this life, anyway. The sooner it's over the better. We wrangle over the things of the world like a pack of fools; but, sooner or later, we all accept the conclusion that the game isn't worth the candle, I'm of opinion. Well, let the rest fight it out among them; I sha'n't take another hand."

He dropped his head upon his arms in utter weariness. There was a sensation of constraint in his breast and a choking pain in his throat, while the feeling of hopeless disappointment and exhaustion forced scalding tears into his eyes. It was no one thing that weighed him down, but the accumulated failures and rebuffs of a lifetime, crowned by rejection at the hands of the woman he loved, and the prospect of soon being branded with infamy.

In his haste to become rich, Cecil Beaumont had entered that maelstrom of gambling which in the Western metropolis takes the place of Wall street. At first, the sagacity or good fortune of his agent yielded him promising returns. Afterward came reverses that swept away all of the means at his command. But he received advices that the "corner" must yield in a few days, and if his investment were now bolstered up by a couple of thousands, they might weather the storm. Then Cecil yielded to the temptation to appropriate funds which were his only in trust.

Again and again had his hands gone into the cof-

fers of his employers, in the desperate effort to retrieve what he had lost; and now he found himself a defaulter to the amount of several thousand dollars, and the cry was still for more.

"I'll give up the struggle; I've had enough of it," he said, bitterly, as his mind passed his life in review. "I tried to wrest enjoyment from fate, and she laughed at me when the golden apples turned to ashes on my lips. Then I resolved to propitiate her by what the world calls honest living, and I have my labor for my pains. The one thing I crave is lost to me, and the rest might as well go with it."

"Oh, perdition!" he cried, springing to his feet and striding fiercely up and down; "I'll put a bullet through my brain, and end it all! I should be benefiting society, at least," he added, laughing bitterly.

"But, no," he continued, with a sudden rigidity of the muscles, "if I cannot win the game myself, it shall not be my fault if it is not a drawn battle. I can stave off detection until I have dragged him in the mire; for, by the fiend! he shall never have her!"

"And if, while I am trampling him under foot, Fortune should yield to my desperation what she has hitherto denied!—ah! that were a stake! With him out of my way, and myself clear of this accursed scrape, what may not be effected? Money!—bah! I'd pour it like water to secure such an end! Ay, I'd dip my hands in blood, to win her for my own!"

He strode up and down in wild exhilaration of hope, running his fingers excitedly through his hair. But the fit burned itself out the quicker because of its intensity; and he again threw himself despondently into a chair.

"Bah! what a fool I am! If I sink him to perdition, she is just the sort of a woman to follow the man she loves to the veriest depths. And if he were dead she cares nothing for me—she never will. It is cold comfort seeking only revenge—living only to thwart another man."

While he was yet struggling with his emotions, a carriage drove up to the private entrance of the bank; a lady alighted, ran up the steps, and in a moment was in his presence.

"Cecil! Are you alone?" she asked, advancing with a bright smile.

"All alone, as you see. Are you looking for your father? He had a business appointment immediately after banking hours."

"But I'm not looking for papa."

"For Fred?" asked Cecil, striving to appear natural, and reaching for a paper on the floor, to hide the repugnance with which he uttered the name.

"He went out soon after four."

"But I am not looking for Fred either."

"No?"

"No!"

She repeated the word after him sharply, with a pretty show of coquettish impatience. Cecil looked up at her inquiringly.

"Is there no one but papa and Fred whom I might call upon—old Dawson, the janitor, for instance? But why are you looking so troubled and worn, Cecil?" she asked, a little shyly, with a sudden shade of anxiety in her eyes.

"Troubled—am I?"

"Why, yes. You don't look well at all; and you haven't seemed yourself for several days."

"I suppose we must lay it to business," he replied, trying to smile. But the attempt was a failure, and died out in the old look of weariness.

May Powell placed her hand on Cecil's shoulder, and looked even more anxiously into his face.

"What is it Cecil?" she asked. "Won't you tell me what troubles you?"

"I suppose we all have the blue devils sometimes, don't we?" he replied, evasively; and added, with bitterness: "No doubt it is very uncomplimentary to let you see that your presence has not altogether banished them."

"Cecil, take me into your confidence. Let me share your anxieties with you. Somehow I feel that it is no trivial cause that moves you so."

There was loving tenderness in her pleading tones; and her humid eyes told how her heart yearned toward him.

Cecil avoided her gaze, as he replied, with a shudder:

"Men are every day called to bear burdens that would be ill-suited to the delicate shoulder of woman."

"There is no cross so grievous that I would not joyously help you to bear it, Cecil. It shall be the one happiness of my life to lighten your burdens."

There came into Cecil Beaumont's heart something like a glow of gratitude for this great devotion, and perhaps a slight twinge of remorse, at the thought how poorly he requited it.

"May," he said, gently, taking her hand between both of his, "I believe that you love me very dearly, little girl."

She clung convulsively to his hands, tears welled into her eyes, and she trembled from head to foot with the unutterable emotion that swayed her.

"Oh, Cecil! So dearly—so dearly! If I could only tell you!"

And, letting an arm glide around his neck, she fell to weeping on his breast.

Who could remain insensible to such a passion? Cecil Beaumont, world worn man as he was, felt his heart softened by her words and tears. It was sore with disappointed ambition and baffled pride; it ached beneath its load of selfishness and sin; and now her pure tears fell upon it like cooling balm. Footsore on the dusty highway of life, her love was to him a shadowy retreat by the wayside, her heart a pure spring where he might lave his parched lips.

He took off her hat and placed it on the desk before him. Then, drawing her head upon his shoulder, he brushed the hair back from her temples and kissed her tenderly.

"May," he said, "I never before realized the depth, the fervor of your love. It is more than I deserve."

"No, no, Cecil; not more than you deserve; but all that my poor heart can generate. Oh, Cecil! do you know?—I never was so happy in all my life!"

And she shrunk closer in his arms with a little tremor of ecstasy.

"Who could help loving you, my darling?" he whispered; and, for the time, Florence Goldthorp faded from his mind, and all the sin and misery of his life was forgotten in a moment of perfect happiness.

The minutes sped by unobserved, while they sat thus, and May was startled by the clock on the man-

tel-piece tinkling half after five. She sprung to her feet with a bright blush.

"Mercy! I believe I almost forgot my errand," she said, laughing.

"Let me see—you called for the janitor?" asked Cecil, slyly.

"Impudence!" laughed May, stamping her foot. "No, sir, I called upon so insignificant a person as the cashier, to give him a little turn in my phaeton, and then take him home to dinner with me."

"The cashier thinks you an angel, and believes himself especially favored of the gods."

May tripped away to a washstand, and began to remove the traces of her recent tears.

"I am afraid that the cashier has made me look more like a fright than an angel," she said, brushing the glossy hair back from her forehead.

"A very pretty fright," said Cecil, gazing at her admiringly, as she put on her hat, "one that Venus might envy, I fancy."

"No compliments between you and me, Cecil," she said, earnestly, with her hand on his arm. "We love each other too sincerely for exaggeration."

Cecil winced a little at this; but he kissed her, and they passed out and entered the carriage.

More than one eye lighted up with admiration, as May Powell swept past in the pony-phaeton; and more than one observer mentally pronounced Cecil Beaumont a lucky fellow. May's eyes sparkled and her cheeks glowed with pleasurable excitement. She was secure in the love of the man she had enshrined in her heart. For the time her bosom was pervaded by a sense of perfect content and peace.

For half an hour they drove on the avenue, and then turned the horses' heads toward Mr. Powell's residence, situated just far enough out of town to be beyond the dust and bustle.

Passing through the business center, they were stopped on a crossing by an entanglement of vehicles in a crowded thoroughfare. May was chatting gayly, when her attention was attracted by a pedestrian who appeared at the side of the carriage.

The man was tall and slim in build, with regular, clear-cut features, and a long, drooping, jet-black mustache. His dress was perplexing. In speckless broadcloth, polished boots, gold-headed cane and kids, he was faultless. It was the black neckcloth, with narrow yellow bars, ornamented by a sparkling diamond, and the white hat, with a band of crape three or four inches wide, tilted slightly on one side, that drew a second glance.

At sight of Cecil, he started and took a step forward, with a look of recognition and parted lips, as if about to speak.

"Does this gentleman know you?" asked May, in an undertone, laying her hand on Cecil's arm.

Cecil turned. The stranger raised his hat, with a marked bow, and a smile that showed his even white teeth, in striking contrast with his black mustache.

May could scarcely repress a shudder. Was there malicious triumph and merciless cruelty in that look; or was it only the surprise of the peculiarity in the Kentuckian's smile?

As for Cecil, he seemed stupefied by some overpowering emotion. The color fled his cheeks, his lips quivered, and a cold sweat started on his brow. Grasping the back of the carriage with a hand that shook as with palsy, he gazed upon the stranger with eyes in which incredulity struggled with amazement and terror.

The stranger arched his eyebrows slightly; smiled again, as he replaced his hat; and complacently drew his mustache through his fingers, first one side and then the other.

The phaeton moved on. The spell was broken. Cecil turned with a long-drawn breath and hastily took the lines from May's hands. He quickly extricated himself from the throng of vehicles; and then applying the whip, went dashing along the streets, turning this way and that and doubling on his course, as if to evade pursuit.

May gazed upon him in utter bewilderment. Why did he tremble so? What gave him that wild look of abject terror?

"Cecil! Cecil! what is the matter?" she asked, in a voice hushed with affright.

But he did not heed her; he seemed to have forgotten her existence.

It was not until they had reached the outskirts of the town, in the direction of her father's house, by a very circuitous route, that he seemed to breathe more freely. Then he turned toward her, and, as he wiped the sweat from his brow, said:

"May, you will excuse me from attending you at dinner. It will be impossible for me to be present this evening. Bear my apologies to your father; but, as you love me make no reference to what has happened. You will pardon me, if I ask you to set me down now and drive home alone!"

He seemed so humbled, so cowed, that May's heart bled with anguish as she looked at him. She clung to his arm, sobbing hysterically:

"Cecil! for God's sake, what is the matter? Confide in me. Who is that terrible man?"

"Not now. Do not ask me," he said, hurriedly; and then, seeing the agony and suspense in her face, he caught her hand, and said, with a quivering lip:

"May, you have loved me, I never knew how well until to-day. In all the dreary waste of my life this is the one bright spot."

And then, with a choking voice:

"When you learn my unworthiness, don't hate me utterly. And now, good-by. Remember you are to say nothing to-night. Once more, God bless you!"

He caught her in his arms and kissed her, while a hot tear fell on her cheek. Then he leaped from the carriage, and walked rapidly toward the city.

May gazed after him, spell-bound, for a moment. Then she caught up the lines with trembling hands, turned the dapple grays and followed him.

"Cecil! Cecil! one word!" she cried, breathlessly, leaning out of the carriage.

He turned and spoke almost fiercely:

"Well?"

"What is about to happen? Where are you going? Oh, come with me. You will be safer there. Don't go back to that dreadful city."

"May, you don't know what you are talking about. It is impossible for me to go to Riverside to-night. Don't be put about by my foolishness a moment ago. Your fears for me are groundless, I assure you."

She leaned out of the carriage and caught him about the neck.

"Oh, my darling!" she cried, "don't leave me. Let me go with you. I shall die of fear and suspense. I know that some terrible danger threatens you. Cecil—dear Cecil—I can't part with you."

"May," he said, disengaging her arms, "this is childish. I cannot explain to you now; but there is danger only in your imagination. Now let me go. Longer detention may be a serious embarrassment to me. Keep a brave heart, my love, until we meet again."

He waved his hand and smiled with an attempt at gayety; but the smile was only a sardonic contortion of the features, and the hollow mockery of cheerfulness in his voice wrung her heart and blinded her with tears.

"Cecil," she said, making the grays keep pace with him, "when shall we meet again?"

"To-morrow," he replied, jerking out the word with an evident effort!

"Surely?"

"Without fail."

She stopped her horses, and watched him as he went down the road. The tears gathered in her eyes so fast that she could scarcely distinguish him. Then a bend in the road hid him entirely from view, and with a great sob, she turned her horses homeward.

CHAPTER III.

BAFFLED FLIGHT.

Cecil Beaumont walked rapidly cityward. He had the appearance of a man fleeing some haunting specter. His bloodless lips twitched nervously; his fear-distended eyes wandered from side to side, as if in dread of some lurking foe.

"Again!" he muttered, beneath his breath. "This is the shadow that is to envelop my whole life. I thought I succeeded in throwing him off the scent, on that fearful night in New York, when I first discovered that he was not dead. And yet this is what I feared. I have lived in sleepless dread of his appearance to drag me down to death and infamy. It has haunted my life, and turned every pleasure to gall and bitterness."

"I resolved to leave the old ways of sin and to redeem the past by a life of temperance and usefulness. Bah! it is a foolish hope. This fiend is my Nemesis. He will dog my footsteps to a grave of shame, blighting every good purpose, blasting every aspiration; goading me to desperation and the gallows; making me a fit companion for himself!"

"Well, I have struggled; I have tried to lead a better life; I have tried to shake him off and he has followed me. But let him look to himself! He must not goad me too far. I shall not always flee him. Let him look to himself!"

His hands were clenched, his eyes blazing, his lips set with desperate resolve. And yet he shivered with dread, as he slunk cautiously through obscure streets, until he gained his boarding-place.

Once within his room, he threw himself into a chair, in the abandon of utter helplessness.

"What can I do?" he muttered; "I can not stay here. A whisper, a breath, a shadow of suspicion—then investigation of my accounts, detection, infamy, a prison, and, if he wills it, the gallows!"

Cecil Beaumont buried his face in his hands and shuddered. Then his mind was crossed by a vision of himself in chains before the amazed and horrified Florence Goldthorp, and he groaned aloud.

"Oh, God! what a price for paltry gold—for a moment of insane pleasure! To forfeit the comforts of a home, the esteem of friends, to become an object of loathing to the only woman I love—and for what?"

Cecil Beaumont arose and paced back and forth, his fingers working nervously, his lips tremulous, and his eyes roving restlessly from side to side.

"Only his life stands between me and security!" he whispered, hoarsely. "Nay, it is his life against mine. Even the deer will fight when brought to bay. Curse him! I have fled from him as from an avenging spirit; but he must not press me too hard. When the finger of scorn is turned against me, he shall not be alive to gloat over his work."

Cecil crossed the room and took from a drawer a highly-polished, silver-mounted revolver. He examined it to see that all the chambers were loaded, and then placed it in a breast-pocket.

"He had better not cross my path," he muttered, fiercely. "He will find me a desperate man, ready to cast all on a single die."

He continued to pace the room, but in one of his turns the window was momentarily darkened. In the gathering twilight he detected a swarthy face, a pair of piercing black eyes, beneath brows that formed a straight line, and a rooping mustache, as black as a raven's wing. As he looked, the mustache was elevated in a smile of fiendish triumph and cruelty, revealing beneath it a line of white teeth. Then the face disappeared like a phantom.

Cecil Beaumont sunk into a chair, with chattering teeth and wild-staring eyes. The apparition had been so sudden that the shock unnerved him.

Quailing, he sat staring at the window, until the light of the departing day died out and left him in utter darkness. Then he arose, with nervous haste.

"I can not stay here," he muttered. "It is waiting for the noose to fall about my neck. With that devil to torture me, I should go mad."

He collected a few things in a satchel, and meeting his landlady as he passed out, said:

"Don't look for me for two or three days, Mrs. McPherson; I shall be out of town," adding to himself, as he stepped on the sidewalk: "Give me two or three days' start, and then follow who can. It won't be the first time I've played hide and seek."

"Haighersel!" sighed the good-hearted woman he left watching him from the doorway; "he's clean broke down wi' trouble and sorrow. Weel, weel, there's mair than ane braw laddy that's gane sare of heart at being scorned by a lassie nae sae bonny as Miss Goldthorp."

Peering warily about him as he advanced, Cecil kept the dark side of the street as much as possible, slouching his hat over his eyes and pulling up the collar of his coat, when he passed under the gas-lights.

He gained the bank, feeling sure that no one had dogged his footsteps.

He drank several glasses of wine to fortify his flagging energies; then bathed his face in cold water and

rubbed it briskly with a coarse towel, to destroy the ghastliness that, reflected in the mirror, made him shudder.

Then he stepped out onto the street and went to the telegraph office. Passing behind the counter, he sat down at the table of the operator, with whom he was acquainted; and while chatting with him (for the wine had given him a sort of reckless ease), began to write on a blank. Then remarking that perhaps he had better wait until morning, he tore up the blank and passed out of the office.

Returning to the bank, Cecil drew from his pocket several blanks that he had secured while the operator's attention was distracted for a moment. Taking down a file of telegrams, he began to imitate the operator's writing. He soon produced what would pass muster with one far more critical than Mr. Powell was likely to be. It read:

"CHICAGO, June —, 18—

"Come immediately. Father cannot live twenty-four hours.

CHAS. BRIGHT."

Cecil inclosed this in a letter in his own handwriting, which ran:

"My dear Mr. Powell, you will see by the inclosed telegram that I am unexpectedly called away. You may look for me day after to-morrow, if nothing unexpected happens," etc.

Having thus taken precautions against suspicion at his sudden departure, until he should have gained at least two or three days' time, he supplied himself with money and was again in the street.

It was with considerable trepidation that Cecil entered the broad light at the depot; but his case was a desperate one, and called for bold action. He might escape detection amid the crowd, if any one was on the watch for him.

His hand was on the door, when, looking through the glass, he discovered his evil genius standing at the ticket-office, carelessly switching the leg of his pantaloons with a light cane. As he turned to make some laughing remark to the ticket-agent, his mustache went up displaying his white teeth.

The earth seemed sinking beneath Cecil Beaumont's feet. He clung to the door a moment to steady himself. Then, with a shudder, he turned away, and staggered toward the waiting train.

Cowering beneath the glance of every stranger, fearing every moment that a heavy hand would fall upon his shoulders, he elbowed his way through the crowd. But no detaining hand disputed his passage, and he stepped upon the car-platform with a wild sense of elation at his narrow escape.

He clutched the door-knob with feverish haste, but stood rooted on the threshold. As he was about to enter, the door at the opposite end of the car opened, and in swaggered the man whom of all men he dreaded most.

The stranger moved carelessly down the aisle, tapping the head of his cane against his lips, and eying the passengers on either side, approaching the verge of rudeness where it happened to be a pretty woman.

Was it skillful maneuvering or chance that threw this man in his pathway at every turn? His actions seemed so natural and unpremeditated, he seemed so oblivious to the proximity of any one in whom he had a special interest, that Cecil felt the chill of superstition creep over him. Was this man unconsciously impelled by some unseen destiny to place himself in the way, so as to thwart the efforts of his victim to escape?

Blind with terror, Cecil turned and groped his way through the crowd. Hailing a cab, he mounted beside the driver, and thrusting a ten-dollar bill into his hand, requested to be allowed to drive. Then getting out of the main thoroughfare he applied the whip, and drove rapidly through the city in every direction, repeating the maneuver of the afternoon.

After twenty minutes, in which he had taken long stretches in quiet streets, to assure himself that he was not followed, he restored the lines to the driver, and leaped to the ground.

"Gads!" muttered the cabman, chuckling over his good fortune, "that gent's a Dick Turpin, 'e is! 'Tain't hevery night, in this 'ere blasted country, has a gentleman takes it hinto 'is 'ead to 'ave a pleasure ride, regardless hof expense. Hif that there cove was a-dodging of the perlice, w'y, hof course, hi was too busy a-counting hof my money to notice it—he! he!"

A rapid walk soon brought Cecil to the levee. A down-river boat was making rapid preparations for departure. Slouching his hat over his eyes and drawing up his coat-collar, he made his way, among the hurrying roustabouts, across the gang-plank, and mounted the stairs to the cabin deck. He was about to enter the saloon, when a sight met his gaze that sent the blood rushing back on his heart.

Crosslegged and with a cigar between his lips sat a man reading the evening paper. He removed his cigar and smiled apparently at something he was reading; and beneath his raven mustache appeared his glittering white teeth.

With a groan, Cecil reeled backward, falling against a man who had ascended the stairs just behind him.

"Hey, there! What the devil! Are you going to knock me down-stairs?" demanded the man, roughly. He was a coarse, brutal-looking fellow, with bushy whiskers and eyes bloodshot with unbridled excesses.

"I beg your pardon, sir—I beg your pardon!" said Cecil, in an humble, propitiatory tone.

Then, with trembling knees and sinking heart, he descended the stairs, recrossed the gang-plank, and fled back into the city.

"It's no use!" he muttered, wildly to himself. "I am confronted at every turn. That demon will hunt me to earth. I feel it."

Glancing nervously about, he saw a man about half a block behind him. It was a quiet street, and there was no one else so near. Something in his appearance made Cecil shudder.

He turned a corner, and listened and watched as he passed hurriedly on. He heard footsteps behind him, but they were on the opposite side of the street. He hastened; they quickened. He lessened his pace; they were retarded.

With a cold sweat on his brow Cecil hurriedly turned a corner and stepped into a doorway. With bated breath he listened. The sound of footsteps had ceased. He waited—five—ten—fifteen minutes.

Save a couple of young "bloods" on their way to some place of nightly carousal, no one appeared.

Cecil stole forth and crept down the street. Was it a shadow that he saw gliding along in the gloom on the opposite side of the street?

Again he turned a corner and ran with all his might. Stopping suddenly, he was sure he heard the muffled footsteps of some one running in the road; but they stopped as soon as he did.

Cecil sought a business street, in the hope of escaping amid the crowd. Turning, after he had passed under a gaslight, he beheld only a few paces behind him, the man against whom he had run on the steamboat. Then hope forsook him, and chilled and benumbed with fear, he gave up the struggle.

He went to the bank and destroyed the letter and telegram, and then started wearily homeward. As he drew near the house, he felt that he was no longer followed; but he expressed no surprise at it; it only showed how secure his enemies felt, and how hopeless would be any further attempt to escape.

As he let himself in with a night-key, Mrs. McPherson appeared at the head of the stairs with a lamp in her hand, and a startled expression on her face.

"Oh! be it you, Mr. Beaumont?" she exclaimed, visibly relieved. "There's a letter left for you nae mair than twa minutes gone. It be lying on the table."

Cecil said something about having changed his mind with regard to his projected journey, and passed on into his room.

For a long time he sat without opening his letter, dreading to touch it, knowing that it contained his doom. Then, with desperate energy, he broke the seal. It read:

"MY MAGNANIMOUS FRIEND:—By the time you receive this epistle, you will have made up your mind that my gratitude will brook no further delay in the hope that it has long cherished, of an opportunity to express to you the obligations I am under, for those services in the past which you so generously ignore. Believe me, sir, I am too much indebted to you to allow myself to be cheated of the satisfaction of making such poor acknowledgment as lies in my power. I receive my friends at 149 River street, and I know that you will not deny me the pleasure of giving you the place of honor beneath my humble roof, at half past ten o'clock this evening."

No signature—there was need of none. Cecil Beaumont dropped his livid face into his hands and groaned aloud.

CHAPTER IV.

TIGER DICK.

On the afternoon of the day when Cecil Beaumont first saw the Kentuckian whose appearance had so strangely affected him—half an hour before they met on the crossing—Fred Powell drove up to the post-office and alighted, leaving Florence Goldthorp in the carriage. Fred had scarcely entered the building when a gust of wind whirled a piece of paper under the horse's feet. The spirited animal uttered a cry of affright, and after a plunge or two, set off at a break-neck pace down the street.

Pale with alarm, yet with a presence of mind unusual in one of her sex, Florence grasped the reins and tried to check his course; but in her feeble hands he was wholly unmanageable.

Vehicles prudently drew aside to the curbstone. Well-meaning persons, whose zeal exceeded their wisdom, vied with each other in giving utterance to a chorus of halloos that would have done credit to a war-party of Comanches. A fat man in his shirt-sleeves ran out into the middle of the street, wildly swinging a straw hat and shouting "Whoa!" at the top of his voice, until the horse got within half a dozen rods of him, when he beat a hasty retreat to the security of the sidewalk, exciting a ghastly sort of amusement, even in the face of the awful danger.

One man seemed possessed of the presence of mind, nerve and address to do something besides augment the general confusion. He quietly stepped into the street, and caught the horse, in passing, by the bit. He was nearly thrown from his feet, but succeeded in stopping the runaway.

A barefooted urchin, proud to be in some way associated with the hero of the occasion, restored his hat. He quietly drew his handkerchief about it, to remove the dirt, placed it on his head, and then received his gold-headed cane from another young American (of foreign descent) whose toilet consisted of brimless straw hat, shirt, trousers (that had suffered abrasion in the usual places) and one suspender.

Meanwhile the customary crowd had gathered around the carriage.

"Help the lady out," said a corpulent gentleman, who wore a fob-chain and English gaiters, and had a very red face and a head as smooth as a billiard-ball.

"Who's hurt?" cried a reporter, coming up out of breath, eager for an item.

"May I assist you to alight, madam?" politely asked a spruce counter-jumper with waxed mustache and perfumed hair.

But, turning from these, Florence leaned out of the carriage, and extending her hand to her preserver, said:

"Oh, sir! I cannot express my gratitude for your noble daring. You have probably saved my life. I hope you are not hurt."

"Not in the least, madam," replied her rescuer, lifting his hat with courtly grace, as if nothing unusual had happened, and accepting her hand.

His sudden smile disclosed a row of even, white teeth, in almost startling contrast with his raven mustache. Florence started slightly. The peculiarity of his smile was surprising, yet not unpleasant. But the open admiration of his gaze was so undisguised that it brought a tinge of embarrassment to her cheeks.

At this point Fred came up, pale with concern for the safety of his companion. When he noted the look of the stranger and its effect upon Florence, a flash of resentment came into his eye and a haughtiness into his mien.

"Believe me, sir," he said, "I have a deep sense of indebtedness to you for what you have done. Accept my card, and if I can ever requite the service, command me, with the assurance that it will be a pleasure to do my utmost."

He thrust his card into the hand of the other, leap-

ed into the carriage, and gathering up the reins, dashed out of the crowd.

The stranger received the card mechanically; started a moment in surprise after the retreating carriage; and then, as an angry frown depressed the center of the straight line formed by his brows, turned on his heel, to hide his chagrin, biting his lip and crushing the card in his palm.

"There's royalty for you," laughed a man who prided himself on his democratic ideas. "To judge from his air, we might think that the young buck was apologizing to our friend here for having inadvertently spattered mud on his boots, instead of thanking him for the life, perhaps, of a young lady."

"How would you like to have a gay young cavalier, with such a killing mustache, make eyes at your ladylove in the open street, hey?" asked another observing individual, at whose humor the crowd laughed, and then dispersed.

These words reached the ears of the stranger before he gained the sidewalk, and he ground his teeth with inward rage.

"The upstart puppy!" he muttered, between his teeth. "I suppose he resented the way I looked at the girl. By heavens! she's a beauty! Such eyes, and such an air—she gave me her hand with the grace of a queen!"

Florence was surprised at the brusque manner in which her lover had treated her preserver.

"Fred," she said, "couldn't you have shown that gentleman a little more courtesy? You were hardly civil. And I wished to learn his name, so that papa could thank him, too."

"I thought that the debt was in part canceled by the insolent stare with which he regarded you," replied Fred, the indignant flash still in his eyes.

Florence had forgotten her momentary embarrassment. She crimsoned slightly at this reminder.

"Who is he?" she asked. "Did you ever see him before?"

"He has been pointed out to me," replied Fred, reddening in turn, for some reason or other.

"What is his name? Do you know?"

"I believe he goes under the sobriquet of 'Tiger Dick,' or something of that kind; but I never heard his real name," replied Fred, still more embarrassed.

"'Tiger Dick!'" repeated Florence, in surprise. "Why, how can he have got such a strange name as that?"

"He is not a man of very high repute, I believe. A gambler or something of that sort. That class of people usually pride themselves in sounding titles."

Florence relapsed into silence, with a meditative look in her eyes. She was thinking of the Vikings and the sturdy old knights of chivalry, who in many points failed to conform to our modern code of morals. She mentally pronounced the stranger a fine-looking man, and his questionable mode of life threw around him a spice of romance. She thought him a Dick Turpin, who, while he might fleece the rich and oppressive, was all of kindness to the suffering, and all of gentleness to the beautiful. How nearly correct was her estimate of the character of Tiger Dick will appear in the course of our story.

Meanwhile the Tiger pursued his walk, far from being in the best of humors.

It was while seeking a restaurant where he was in the habit of taking his meals, that he came upon Cecil and May, after their drive on the avenue. At sight of Cecil, a gleam of malicious satisfaction came into his eyes.

"Aces all, by Jove!" he muttered. "Just what I've been figuring for. Truly the devil helps his own."

He saw May touch her companion's arm. Cecil turned to look. Then the Tiger lifted his hat and smiled, with all the devil of his nature in his eyes. With a thrill of triumph he saw Cecil's face assume a livid hue, saw him reel beneath the shock of terror, saw him snatch the reins from May's hands and fly by as if pursued by all the fiends.

"Hah! A center shot, that!" chuckled the Tiger, caressing his mustache with immense satisfaction. "Struck him all in a heap, by Jove! Ha! ha! me noble juk! no more of your capering. You gave me the slip cunningly enough in New York; but if you hold over me this time, why, you're welcome to rake the board—that's all!"

He reached the restaurant, and ate his supper with a gusto.

"Those drops of terror wrung from the brow of the Prince are not bad sauce," he meditated. "Where's all his spirit, I wonder? Rocks! in the good old days he would have let daylight through me, sooner than throw up his hand like that. But he has never held up his head since that game when the little joker turned up so unexpectedly—only once, confound him! but then it was a spiteful fling."

Tiger Dick ran his fingers through his hair, until they touched a livid scar on the side of his head, as broad as his finger and a couple of inches in length.

"Oh, well," he said, lightly, "I'm not the cuss to whine over that. He played his highest trump and is welcome to the trick. But now it's my turn. Every dog has his day, and luck is bound to turn some time."

From the restaurant, Tiger Dick went to No. 149 River street. Avoiding the front entrance, he passed in at a side door, and having traversed a narrow hall, found himself in a little room at the back. It was furnished with a table (on which were decanters and wine-glasses), two or three chairs, and a couch spread with a buffalo-robe. The walls were decorated with pictures illustrative of scenes in the life of a "sport." Over the couch was a pair of crossed foils, and from the nail which supported them hung a pair of boxing-gloves.

Tiger Dick pulled a bell-cord, and in response to his summons appeared a boy, in his shirt-sleeves, and with a small white apron tied about his waist.

"Has Jim come in yet?" asked the Tiger.

"No—not since supper," was the reply.

"Well, when he puts in an appearance, send him here. And, Tommy, tell McFarland and O'Toole to report—sharp; it's business."

As the boy disappeared, Tiger Dick drew writing materials before him, and wrote:

"Go home and await my summons. If you persist in flight, you will be denounced and put under arrest on the arrival of the train at the first station. You have been under surveillance for more than a week. My emissaries are ever at your elbow."

He wrote a second note, like the above, making suitable changes so that it would apply to a steam-

boat. He had scarcely finished when he came two men whose appearance sufficiently indicated their disreputable character.

"Well, gents," said the Tiger, "I've got a little business for you to-night. You both know the sport that calls himself Cecil Beaumont—a bank cashier?"

The men nodded assent.

"Well, I want you, Mac, to go to the levee—there's one of the Diamond Jo line down to-night—and you, O'Toole, to the depot; and if our bird tries to take wing, and I'm not on hand, give him this note, just before the boat (or train, as the case may be) leaves. But if I am around, mind you do nothing. Now, look sharp, and report again at midnight."

The men received each his note and withdrew.

A few minutes later the door opened to give admittance to a young man who rejoiced in the suggestive name of Shadow Jim. He was slight in build, and his life of dissipation found its index in blood-shot eyes and sallow cheeks. He was at present dressed so as to be least likely to attract attention.

"So-long! me noble juk!" said the Tiger, greeting him pleasantly. "What's the word?"

"He's at home," replied Jim, sitting astride a chair with his arms resting on the back.

"Good! And how does he look?"

"As if he had the devil for a bedfellow," was the expressive reply.

The Tiger laughed.

"Shadow, smile, do!" he said, pushing a decanter across the table.

Jim smiled literally, with a beaming radiance, as he poured out the liquor; and then, holding it between his eye and the light, said, as if apologizing to his conscience, or, perhaps, his stomach:

"If Timothy partook, why not I? It's as harmless as a dove!"

He shut his eyes as the liquor glided down his throat, and then placed the glass on the table, with a little sigh of enjoyment, looking at it fondly, almost sadly.

Tiger Dick watched him with an amused smile, and then burst into a laugh.

"By Jove, Shadow," he said, "it's better than drinking oneself, to see you get outside of a glass of benzine. If I could coax so much bliss out of the fire-water, I'd ask no greater favor of Heaven."

"But this ain't business," he added, briskly. "I came face to face with our gosling this afternoon. I know that he will try to slip through my fingers, and have sent McFarland and O'Toole to the train and boat, to clip his wings. This is in case he gets the start of me; but I mean to be on hand myself to meet him. Do I make a good Gorgon?"

Tiger Dick smiled his peculiar smile, the white teeth glittering like cruel fangs, his eyes gleaming malicious triumph from beneath his straight brows, which, when depressed in the center, gave him an appearance not unlike the popular representation of "the gentleman in black."

"I think that Dr. Faustus would have flown to the devil for protection, had you appeared on the stage with that look," was the flattering assurance of Shadow Jim.

"Smile again, my infant," said the Tiger, not ill pleased. "I'll not break in upon your little heaven with the paltry affairs of this mundane sphere, but wait until you return to earth."

Jim set his glass down on the table and looked at the Tiger expectantly.

"You must shadow this dainty cashier, Jim, and if he is likely to escape, give him this love-letter. I am not much afraid that he will disregard my other missives, if it is necessary to give them to him; but I want the trap tight, and we can't take too many precautions. If I scare him home, do you get there a few minutes before him and leave the letter. And now to business. I may take a look in on him myself, as the shadows deepen, just to give him a smile of encouragement, you know."

And, with a laugh, he arose and led the way to the open air. He stopped to lock the door, and when he turned about, Jim had disappeared like a veritable shadow.

The reader has seen that the Tiger did look in upon Cecil, and what was the effect; also the maneuvering at the depot and at the steamboat. We may add that Shadow Jim purposely let Cecil know that he was followed, to lighten the effect, and that Cecil's seeing McFarland on the street, after he had vainly tried to shake off Shadow Jim, was an accident, favorable, however, to the plotters.

When the Tiger had played his part, he returned to River street, elated at his success, to await the coming of Cecil Beaumont, of whose compliance with his demand he had no doubts.

CHAPTER V.

THE TIGER SPORTS WITH HIS PREY.

THE cool irony of the letter which summoned Cecil Beaumont to No. 149 River street, struck a chill of despair to his soul. The Tiger, like his ferocious namesake, was playing with his prey before devouring it.

With a shudder, Cecil heard the clock strike ten. Its monotonous throb sounded like a knell.

"It is destiny," he said, with a superstitious thrill that was a legacy from his early life. "There's no use fighting against it. I feel it drawing me down, down to perdition!"

He drew the pistol from his pocket, with a wild desperation, and for a moment he was nearer suicide than men often are, and yet escape. But he turned shuddering away.

"No," he muttered, "that is not my appointed death. I cannot escape that way, even if I had the courage. No, no; I must drag the galling chain of my bondage to the bitter end. But, curse him!" he added, his eyes glowing like coals, "we go down together! He escaped once; he shall not do so a second time."

He looked again to the loading of the weapon and placed it in his pocket. Then he drew from the satchel, which he had previously packed, a set of false whiskers and a wig, to which was attached a pair of spectacles. With these he effectually disguised himself, and then quietly left the house.

"It wouldn't do for Cecil Beaumont, a bank cashier, to be seen entering a gambling-den," he muttered, with a bitter laugh. "I must play the game out to the last. Who knows what may turn up. Why did not this fool balance our account at once? He evidently means to use me for something. I'll war-

rant he'll find me a slippery customer, and he may get a leaden pill that will cure all his ills."

Revolving in his mind plans for circumventing his enemy, Cecil found himself in River street. Just across the way was an illuminated sign, the letters formed of glass brilliants, as follows:

"149 THE JUNGLE. 149"

While Cecil was reading it, a hand tapped him lightly on the shoulder.

"You have an appointment with Tiger Dick?" asked a voice at his elbow.

Cecil turned with a start. He had not heard the man's approach. It was McFarland.

"What do you know about my appointments?" demanded Cecil, with a frown.

"Your grace is in an ill-humor this evening," said McFarland, meaningly.

"Who are you? What do you mean?" asked Cecil, the arrogance of his tone giving place to a tremor of apprehension.

The man smiled.

"I'm a sport as gets my beer-money from Tiger Dick," he replied, in his natural voice. "My handle's McFarland, at your service."

"And he stationed you here?"

"To waltz you up to the captain's office, as quick as you chipped in."

"Did he expect any one?" asked Cecil, careful not to commit himself.

"He 'peared sorter confident as you'd come to time," replied McFarland, with a grin.

"Show me to him," said Cecil, with desperate calmness.

The confidence of Tiger Dick in his power weighed like a hand of iron on the quailing soul of his victim.

McFarland turned upon his heel, and conducted him by the side entrance into the presence of the Tiger.

He was reading a paper, but threw it aside at Cecil's entrance, and greeted him, with a smile that chilled him to the heart.

"Ah, Prince! let me commend your gracious promptness. Accept the homage of your most humble liege."

He pushed forward a chair, and Cecil seated himself.

"Let us have no shilly-shally, but come to business. What do you want?"

"An old want with me—money, for one thing," said the Tiger, smiling. "But before we proceed to that, I have a little story which I wish to recount—some reminiscences, in fact, which I know you will be pleased to have recalled. And what so appropriate, when friends meet, as to go over old times?"

"I care nothing for your reminiscences," replied Cecil, with a frown, yet he could scarcely repress a shudder. "You did not summon me here to listen to chin-music. Come, make up your game, and we'll have a square deal."

The old life was cropping out in his speech, reappearing in the *palots* of slang peculiar to the class represented by the Tiger.

"Now, my dear Prince," protested the Tiger, with undisturbed equanimity, "you know my methodical way. I'm something of a conservative, and there's nothing like time-honored customs. From time immemorial, newly-united friends have found their chief enjoyment in recalling the pleasant scenes of the past—with the enchantment of distance, you know. What better can we do than to follow the beaten path?"

"But," he pursued, an undercurrent of deep significance flowing beneath his air of complaisance, "the story has some exciting passages. See, I am willing to treat you with perfect fairness," he pushed across the table one of two pistols that lay before him. "I do not even request you to lay aside your spectacles, though they kill the glances of those innocent eyes of yours."

"Keep your weapon," replied Cecil, pushing it back to him. "If you had intended to shoot me, I should never have been here."

"That's so, sport, as sure's as you are a living man!"

There was an intensity of earnestness in Tiger Dick's voice and look that made Cecil pale in spite of himself.

"And now to my tale," said the Tiger, recovering his bantering humor.

It was a cruel story. All the wretched past was dragged into view, and its scenes of shame and iniquity painted in such vivid colors, that it almost drove the listener distracted. Before it was half through, he sprang to his feet with livid lips and horror-distended eyes, and beads of agony glistening on his forehead.

"Stop, you devil, he cried, thrusting his hand into the breast of his coat for his revolver.

Not a muscle of Tiger Dick's face moved. There was the smile of fiendish delight. Without any apparent haste or perturbation, he took up one of the pistols, and with his elbow resting on the table, covered Cecil Beaumont's heart with the weapon.

"Take your wing out of there, my pigeon," he said, quietly, yet with a deadly purpose in his eye. "Whenever you want one of these here little bulldogs, you can have your choice; but no mongrels in this pit, if you please."

The cool tones of the Tiger, and the knowledge that nothing but a hair-trigger stood between him and death, quieted Cecil's excitement, and he drew forth his hand and dung himself into his chair in desperation.

"Curse you! stow your gab and come to business. What do you want of me?" he asked, doggedly.

"Softly, me noble juke!" said his tormentor, tormentingly. "You interrupted me in the middle of my story. It has a *denouement*, which, I flatter myself, is quite effective, and, withal, the most delightful part of the story."

Cecil shuddered.

"And must I listen to your fiendish recital?"

The Tiger smiled his blandest smile.

"Upon my soul, I see no way out of it."

"Go on," growled Cecil, gnashing his teeth savagely. "You hold trumps to-day; but, curse you! my turn will come, and you will find me equally merciful."

"That's right, Prince. I love to hear you talk in that way. It sounds like the good old days. Curse me! It makes me feel like a boy again! But to resume. Let me see, where did I leave off? Oh!"

He began again, dwelling on each salient point, seeming to roll it under his tongue, like some

toothsome morsel. His victim writhed under his words, but every quiver, every contraction of the muscles, caused a thrill of delight to the human tiger.

"Oh, what a pretty tale to tell to the magistrates," he said, in conclusion. "I seem to see the densely-packed court-room; the spectators gazing in horror at the prisoner, while the judge dons his black cap and sentences him to be hanged by the neck until he be dead—dead—dead! And then the gallows—the surging throng—the yells and jeers—the awful moment of breathless suspense; then the drop and the distorted writhing of the doomed wretch!"

"Stop! stop!" yelled Cecil, wrought to frenzy.

With a swift motion he grasped one of the pistols which lay on the table, and at the same time swept the other to the floor. The Tiger was taken completely off his guard. Cecil's head had been resting on his arms, and Tiger Dick did not look for such a move as this. Cecil leaped to his feet, and covered the other with his weapon.

"Ha! ha!" he cried, with exultation; "what's trumps now?"

Tiger Dick sat still; not a muscle relaxed; he regarded the other with the same unchanged smile.

"Curse you! why do you sit there, grinning like the fiend you are?" demanded Cecil, surprised at the *nonchalance* of the other.

Tiger Dick blew a curl of smoke from between his lips, and watched it with steady composure, as it ascended to the ceiling.

"Do you realize that only a feather's weight bars your soul from perdition?" asked Cecil, in greater wonder.

"More than that," answered Tiger Dick, with apparent unconcern.

"More? What more?"

The Tiger smiled, with a little shrug of the shoulders. He withdrew his cigar, blew another wreath of smoke into the air, and then, fixing his gaze upon Cecil with a magnetic intensity, said, simply:

"The gallows!"

All of the horrible scene that a moment before had goaded him to frenzy, stood out before his mind with blood-curdling vividness. Shuddering, Cecil Beaumont sunk back into his seat, his arm falling to his side as if struck with palsy.

"Have some wine," said the Tiger, pushing a decanter toward him; and Cecil accepted the invitation, the lip of the decanter clinking on the glass with the tremulousness of his hand, as he poured out the liquor.

CHAPTER VI. A DARK COMPACT.

A SMILE of triumph curled Tiger Dick's lip as he noted the effect of his words.

"You see, Prince, we can't afford to quarrel," he said.

"Will you come to the point, and tell me what you want of me? State your case and let me go."

Cecil strove hard to appear still master of himself; but the cool sarcasm of the other had cut clear through the armor of bravado in which he had incased himself; and while he still preserved a hollow show of boldness in his words, the tremor in his voice betrayed his weakness.

"Gently, me noble juke," expostulated the Tiger, coolly. "You have told me nothing of yourself. Do you know, I am burning with curiosity to learn what has happened to you since last we met—say, after that little game of hide-and-seek in New York."

"What is my life to you? If you look to me for money, you will find yourself sucking a dry lemon."

"Money! Now, Prince, you know I scorn the sordid pelf. Believe me, my interest in you is purely unselfish."

"I don't question your disinterestedness; but what do you want?"

"But, me lord, why so precipitate? It is true that, now that we are restored to each other, we may be of mutual benefit."

"Well, pitch your trump. Of what benefit can I be to you?"

"Softly! You know we must make our game somewhat according to the run of the cards. As yet, I know nothing of your present circumstances—only that you are cashier of a bank."

"That has nothing to do with the case in hand."

"My dear Prince, everything! The whole game depends on what's trumps, you know. You have a salary—may I ask its amount?"

"Curse you! what has that to do with the case? I suppose it is the gauge by which you propose to bleed me."

"Me noble juke, when will you disabuse your mind of that prejudice? Indeed, you wound me sorely by imputing such unworthy motives. It is only my friendly interest in your prosperity, I assure you. I know that you will gratify me."

In his bantering tones there was a ring of iron determination.

Grinding his teeth at his helplessness, Cecil replied:

"I draw a salary of two thousand a year; but I warn you that that is no indication of the length of my account."

"My liege, I am grieved to hear you say so. But then you were never very provident, as I remember. In the good old days, you could flip a penny about as quick as any sport I ever set eyes on. But this bank—it is a private concern?"

"It is owned by Harold Carrington and his son-in-law, David Powell."

"Mr. Powell is the president, and this Mr. Carrington the 'silent partner,' or, in other words, the money-man, I presume?"

"That is the case."

"Socially, you go cheek-by-jowl with these nabobs, of course?"

"Why not?" demanded Cecil, with a frown.

"Egad! you were always a gentleman, me noble juke. And as to any little squeamishness touching how one comes by one's money, demmy if the rascals ain't as respectable as bullies and bearing on Wall street, and cornering grain in Chicago! I'll lay my pile on you, for as fine a gent as they turn out of the shops."

Tiger Dick gazed with unfeigned admiration on his companion. Cecil frowned with impatience.

"Well, what do you make of all this?" he demanded.

"Me noble juke!" cried the Tiger, enthusiastically, passing over Cecil's words, "more than half a dozen years ago I had an inspiration. I saw that you were a genius, and made very cordial overtures, as you will remember, to the effect that we should cast our fortunes together. You were blind, Prince, and didn't see it. Your rash hand overthrew the whole scheme. I forgive you—egad, I do; for it was well played, and came devilishly near being a ten-strike!"

—and the Tiger ran his fingers through his hair until they touched the livid scar on the side of his head—

"but it was a mistake, Prince, a mistake, by Jove! for we could have made our fortunes—two such lights as you and I. But perhaps you thought that after raking the board, you could play it alone?" he added, smiling.

To one conversant with the circumstances, his humor was ghastly. Cecil shuddered.

"Stow all that," he said, "and return to the present, and to business. What am I here for?"

"All in good time, me noble juke; but a little more about yourself, if you please. May I ask who was the young lady I saw in your company this afternoon?"

"What do you want to drag her in for?" demanded Cecil, angrily.

"I know that Sunday-school people would call it a sacrilege, that the name of a pure young woman should be on the lips of such fellows as you and I!"

—his words were pointed by a momentary flash of the eye, that struggled with a sneer—"but"—and the old bantering tone returned—"You know me as a man of taste; and, really, she is a prize for a prince."

"Did you summon me here to discuss the personal appearance of women? If so, you are welcome to any opinion you choose to entertain, and we can end this meeting without further words."

"Your hot temper, Prince—your old impetuosity! How such things cling to a fellow. You haven't told me who she is."

"Will it do you any good to know that she is Mr. Powell's daughter?"

"His only one?"

"Yes."

"And called—"

"May, curse you!"

"Really, Prince, your humor is sadly choleric, this evening."

"Go on with your catechism, and don't stop to comment, if you please."

"To be sure, there are what might be considered extenuating circumstances—something to interrupt the unruffled current," persisted the Tiger, as smilingly as ever; but Cecil, writhing beneath his cool insolence, cut him short.

"Is there anything more that you want to know?"

"Patience, my lord, patience! Let me see—her name is May Powell; she is daughter of a wealthy banker, and granddaughter of another old money-bags in his dotage. My dear Prince, your relations with this charming creature—are they confidential?"

"This is folly! Of what importance to you are my relations with Miss Powell?"

"Of what importance to me? Not the slightest in the world—only as your friend—as one deeply interested in your welfare, you know. But to you, everything. Whatever your shortcomings, you never incurred even the suspicion of obtuseness where money was concerned. It will be needless for me to point out her attractions. My soul! a father with one hand all the time in the till, and a grandfather a Cressus, and in years! Come, come, you have not shut your eyes to this. Tell me that she is your friend."

"I am on terms of intimacy with her, if that is any gratification to you."

"That is the beginning. But, of course, you have fallen madly in love with her—her eyes, her hair, her form! The devil! one might easily fall in love with a scare-crow, if it were made of gold. But she—she is an angel with a form like a fairy, eyes that shone the blue of heaven, and hair as yellow as her grandfather's guineas. You have told her of this passion—this upheaval of your whole nature—this master-chord that sways your existence?"

"Yes!" growled Cecil, since there was no help for it.

"And she—ah! with the Prince at her feet, what woman could say no? Keno! you're not an ogre, by any means. Those hands—they were always get-teel, and—"

"Deal on!" cried Cecil, impatiently. "Ask for what you want. Don't volunteer information. Your opinions are indifferent to me."

"My Prince, how ungracious! But let it pass. She could not find it in her heart to say you nay. She gave her virgin affections into your keeping. She made you the arbiter of her fate. Is it not so?"

"She engaged herself to me."

"Prince, I congratulate you. The gods were always good to you. When you lay on the red, red it is. Again, I congratulate you."

"Stow your congratulations and drive ahead. Let's have an end of this."

"You have the parents' blessing and the Godspeed of kind friends and neighbors? Why need I ask? I saw her hand upon your arm. You are happy in your love. When is the auspicious occasion—the red-letter day of your conjugal calendar?"

"No day has been set."

"Eh? Who is at fault? Not the lady, I'll be sworn. The father?—ah, those fathers! What said the grim parent, when you urged the matter?"

"Nothing. I have never urged it."

"What, sirrah! Show your hand, pard. What are you holding back?"

In his surprise, Tiger Dick dropped his air of irony, and returned to his natural manner, along with its slang.

"Her father knows nothing about our engagement," said Cecil, in desperation.

"The devil!"

Tiger Dick stared across the table, utterly bewildered. Cecil sat frowning, evidently with no intention of coming to his relief.

"May I venture to ask why her parent is left in the dark?" said the Tiger.

"You may venture to do whatever you think fit," replied Cecil, quietly, with a resolute setting of the lips.

There was something in his manner that warned

the Tiger that he had gone as far in this direction as he could. Dick was a diplomat, and knew better than to lose his power, by coming to a dead-lock in anything. He shrugged his shoulders indifferently.

"Put it in another form," he said; "I don't stick for any particular trump. Do you have any idea that the governor would sour on your little game, if you put in your bid for the calico?"

"I have no reason to think that he would oppose our marriage."

"That's satisfactory. As for your private reasons, they are neither here nor there; they won't influence the game. A whim, a fancy, what you will. But answer me this—if you choose to marry this girl six months hence—can you do it?"

"I see nothing in the way of it."

"And she is heir to her grandfather's stamps?"

"Together with her brother."

"Hey! her brother?"

"She has a brother."

"Only one?"

"Only one."

"And how old?"

"Twenty-two or three."

"Powell—Powell! Is this the cad?"

Tiger Dick drew a crumpled card from his pocket. The center of his straight brows was drawn down until they formed an obtuse angle, and his thin nostrils quivered with suppressed feeling.

"That is his name," replied Cecil, wondering at the agitation of the Tiger.

"And this fellow is to share the fortune with the future Mrs. Beaumont. By the way, about how much may it be?"

"Say two hundred and fifty thousand."

Cecil's eyes glistened, and his tone became more confidential, as he discussed old Mr. Carrington's accumulations.

Tiger Dick leaned across the table and spoke in a low, concentrated voice.

"I say, par! have you any particular love for this kid?"

A look of hatred darkened Cecil's brow. It did not pass unnoticed by the Tiger. He spoke still lower, and his eyes read Cecil Beaumont's soul.

"Pard, we want that money, and we're going to have it. This bantam must stand aside!"

It was as if a flame had darted from his eyes and pierced Cecil to the heart. He started back, with a shudder and a thrill that blanched his cheeks.

The Tiger shrugged his shoulders and laughed lightly.

"Oh, not that way," he said. "It won't do in this part of the country, only as a last resort. We'll try fair means first; but we must have the money!"

Tiger Dick thought a moment, and then looking up, said:

"Of what stamp is this fellow? Is he anything of a sport?"

"He is about like other young fellows of his position in society."

"Drinks?"

"Moderately."

"A fool. Does he ever play any?"

"Not that I ever knew of."

"Plays billiards and bets at horse-races, of course."

"I know an instance of his having won a bet."

"Co-rect! That's the first hand."

Again Tiger Dick meditated. Presently he spoke. "I met him in a buggy, with a young girl with long black hair and black eyes—a very queen. Who is she?"

"I recognize no particular person by your description," said Cecil; but his words were belied by a wave of passion that shook his frame and drove the color from his lips.

Tiger Dick's eyes read his face.

"Aha!" he thought, "here's a gay young bantam secretly engaged to a fair damsel. Without any apparent reason, he scowls like a pirate at the mention of her brother's name; and then goes green in the face over the unrecognized description of some other Dulcinea seen in the brother's company."

Tiger Dick's face did not reveal the discovery; but he put this and that together, and arrived very nearly at the truth.

"Is he engaged to any one?" pursued the Tiger. "We must know all the cards in the enemies' hand, to play a sure game."

"Not that I know of," replied Cecil, in a choking voice.

"You transparent idiot!" thought the Tiger; but he said:

"Look-a-here, pard, how does our fledgeling get his beer-money?"

"He has a salary of a thousand a year, as clerk in the bank."

"Pugh! That don't keep him in shoe-strings."

"I suppose he contracts debts, like others of his class."

"And trusts to luck and the governor's good-nature to pay them. I say, pard, when these young bucks begin to devote their stamps to charitable purposes—trying to pare the claws of the tiger for instance—they get mighty desperate, sometimes."

"Well?"

"Billy Saunderson must make the acquaintance of this infant, and show him the sights. He, in his innocence, tries conclusions with Tiger Dick, which is step one. 'Give a dog a bad name,' you know."

"Yes. Well?"

"Pard, do you shove as nasty a quill as you used to, in the good old days?"

"I write as well as ever," replied Cecil, beginning to see the drift of the other's plan.

"One question more. What kind of an old gent is this grandfather? Does he go in heavy on honesty being the best policy, and all that sort of thing?"

"He is unusually rigid in his notions of strict integrity."

"I thought so. They are all that way, after they get so old that they can't steal any more themselves. I suppose, now, he'd throw overboard a fellow that, at a time of momentary forgetfulness, should sign somebody else's name, instead of his own, to a little paper with dollars and cents on it?"

"He would cast off his own son for such an act."

"Or, better still, his grandson?"

"Or, his grandson."

"Well, let me prophesy a little bit—I sometimes indulge in that sort of thing. A certain young gosling is drawn into bad company. In due time a Chicago bank pays a draft for, say five hundred, purporting to be drawn by Messrs. Powell & Co., bankers, which

the same they never drew. Evidence of having imitated the signature of Powell *pere* is found in Mr. Fred's desk. His associations are ventilated. What so likely as that he should get hard up, and raise the wind somewhat irregularly? As it is all in the family, of course no exposure takes place; but he is sent away for his health. Grandpa is outraged and changes his will. The cashier weds the object of his devotion. At the death of the aged progenitor, your humble servant pockets a hundred thousand, or such matter, and waltzes off to Europe, while the sorrowing grandson follows the bent of his peculiar genius with the rest. Do you think such a prophecy is at all likely to come true?"

Tiger Dick leaned across the table and extended his hand.

"Pard," he said, "put it there! Will you chip into this pool?"

Cecil hesitated.

"It's a pity to break the heart of that little angel with the black hair and eyes, if she has got her pile on that particular Jack; but every one must play his own hand in this here little game, eh, pard?"

The Tiger spoke with his piercing eyes on Cecil's face. At mention of the black hair and eyes, Cecil flushed, then paled, and setting his teeth hard, grasped the Tiger's hand.

PART II—HUNTED DOWN.

CHAPTER I.

THE DECOY DUCK.

TIGER DICK sat with his heels elevated on the table, sipping a sherry cobbler and glancing over the morning paper. A smile played about his lips, as if his thoughts were amusing.

"Gads! how the Prince squirmed," he said, half-aloud. "Ha! ha! I flatter myself that that hand was well played. Well, well! better a live mouse than a dead lion. Had I settled old scores in the most approved fashion, his carcass would have been worth nothing; but now I have him in my breeches-pocket, and trust me I'll squeeze the shiners out of him!"

"Dick, you old tiger, in your old age you will yet stretch yourself in the golden sunshine of prosperity. You have tempered righteous indignation with common sense. Instead of coming on the stage with blood in your eye, you appear as a diplomat. Bowling wisdom down the alley of self-interest, you have made a ten-strike worthy of your genius!"

At this point his soliloquy was cut short by the opening of the door. It gave admittance to a young man dressed in the extreme of fashion, with silk hat tilted on one side, mustaches waxed and drawn to a point, flaming neck-handkerchief, showy watch-guard, and whalebone cane, loaded at the end with a ball of lead in a network of wire.

"Howdy, ole man?" was his greeting.

"Squat," said the Tiger, pushing a chair toward him with his foot.

Billy Saunderson, for such was his name, seated himself on the table and placed his feet on the chair.

"Messrs. Brown & Thurlow's book-keeper is always ready for refreshments?" asked the Tiger, touching the bell-cord.

"Oh, hush!" replied Mr. Saunderson, closing one eye and tilting his hat onto the back of his head.

"A repairer of old boots and shoes," he said to the boy who answered the bell; and when the "cobbler" was brought, he turned to the Tiger, and said:

"Well, boss, you sent for me?"

"Billy, boy, I did. Your noble mission is to let in the light on benighted patent-leathers and kids—to take high-heeled gents in leading-strings, and display the elephant to their open-mouthed simplicity. What a calm joy there must be in seeing these tender buds unfold beneath your watchful care."

"Yes, boss; but it takes the skads, you're just a whistling!"

"To the martyr belongs the crown, Billy. You have the reward of an approving conscience. But among all your flock, is there a lamb called Fred Powell?"

"That's where I live!" replied Billy, with enthusiasm.

"Billy, are you doing the square thing by your friend and admirer? How I long to make the acquaintance of that tender shoot."

"Sh-h-h!" sibilated Billy, raising his eyebrows and extending his hand, as in admonition.

"What's the go?" asked the Tiger. "Is he his mother's darling boy?"

"Not that exactly," replied Saunderson; "but an old maid plays the duenna over him."

"How's that, pard? Gads alive! you don't call that black-eyed Peri an old maid? Steady, old boss; you're flying the track, sure."

"Ha! ha! ha! All down but mine! Set 'em up on the other alley! I say, ole man, what set you to wagging your jaw about black-eyed Peri, eh?"

"I pass. What's trumps, pard?"

"Play your hand out," persisted Mr. Saunderson, still laughing. "How about the black eyes?"

"Drop it, Billy, or I'll give you a black eye, s'elp me Bob!"

"You've seen the Goldthorp, ole man. Oh, no! she ain't an old maid."

"My facetious friend," said the Tiger, who still felt a little "edgewise" at being laughed at; "who may this Goldthorp be, pray tell?"

"An odd card, Dick, not marked after the ordinary fashion, by any means. She lives with an uncle."

"And what's between her and young Powell?"

"They're as thick as molasses in January."

"Engaged?"

"Not knowing, can't say. They have very ungenerously left me out of their confidence."

"Stow chaff, Billy. Has she money?"

"If salt was three cents a barrel, she couldn't buy enough to season a snipe—and a little snipe, at that!"

"And this uncle will leave her—what?"

"I believe those that have been watching the run of the cards are pretty unanimous in the opinion that he won't leave her, nor anybody else, much of

anything. But he'll make the feathers fly as long as he's above ground; and when the king-pin goes, it'll be a ten-strike—all down."

"Um—hum!" said Tiger Dick, his mind going back to Cecil Beaumont. "Now you can go on and tell me what you meant by saying that Fred is under the wing of an old maid."

"Why, you see, a cad by the name of Charley Brewster is spoony on the beautiful and accomplished Miss Powell, and has constituted himself a committee of one to keep her darling brother out of the company of bad boys."

"With what success?"

"Well, it's kind of up-hill work. You see, I'm quite fond of Fred. He's a gay young rooster, and I'm another, you know. What he exceeds in money, I make up in love, and so we're even, don't you see?"

"Billy, you'll do to travel. But you must bring him here, my pet. It ain't an ordinary case. Money is no object."

"Eh?" said Billy, looking up, with interest.

"Never mind the whys and wherefores; but polka him up to the captain's office, and hang the expense. You understand?"

"Oh, yes," replied Billy, scratching his head and making a comical grimace; "it's all as clear as mud. But you've said 'Trot him out!' and trot him out it is."

"That's right, Billy. Be content to play your own hand, and don't go peeping into your neighbor's."

"Let up on your paternal advice, ole man. Do I ever interfere with anybody else's alley? Nary! It's all I want to do to keep my own pins up. So endeth the first lesson?"

"That's all that's down in the books."

"Have a cigar. And now, wag."

Saunderson extended his hand and Tiger Dick grasped it.

"By-by!" and the decoy duck was gone.

That evening Billy Saunderson stood on the steps of his hotel, picking his teeth after supper. Presently he caught sight of Fred Powell coming down on the other side of the street.

"So-long! Freddy," he called out. "Are you traveling or going somewhere?"

"Traveling," replied Fred, crossing over.

"I've just got a letter from my grandmother, requesting an interview at the Dutch Gardens, and I want a protector. Won't you go along?"

"I shall be very glad to see the old lady," replied Fred, accepting Billy's facetious invitation to a drive on the avenue, which led to a beer-garden just without the city limits.

"Granny's something of a shrew, Fred. Let's fortify our courage before going to meet her," continued Billy, who seldom said anything in a straightforward way, if chaff could invent a whimsical figure.

Fred laughed and accompanied Saunderson to the hotel bar, where, to use Billy's expression, they took their "reg'lar p'ison."

Fred called for cigars, and arm-in-arm they sought a livery-stable, and soon emerged in a dashing "rig." Arrived at the gardens, they alighted, tied their horse among a dozen others, and entered. Billy glanced around the room, and then turned upon Fred, his face drawn down with mock disappointment.

"My bosom friend," he said, lugubriously, "granny ain't here! Suppose she's dead?"

His expression was so comical that Fred burst into a laugh.

"Never mind," he said; "there's one solace for all grief. Come along and imbibe."

They stepped up to the bar, along which were ranged half a dozen young men like themselves, eating "Deutsches brod" and thin slices of "bologna" with their beer, while a dozen more were in the room, seated at tables.

Fred and Billy were greeted on all hands, and were soon in the midst of a roistering set, who, as their spirits rose, attempted to sing "We're jolly good fellows, all," and "We won't go home till morning," with only indifferent success.

The moon was up when the bacchanals set out for the city; and while some went off at a mad race, others jogged leisurely along—"Making night hideous with discordant howls, by a strange misnomer called singing," said Billy—"and still they're not happy!"

Neither of the friends were intoxicated when, half an hour later, they entered a billiard-room together; but they had drunk enough to feel a genial glow of satisfaction with themselves and all the world; and when Fred espied Charley Brewster, he slapped him on the shoulder, and said:

"Hallo, old fellow. Join us in a game of pool, do."

Charley assented; but there was a grave look on his face as he noticed that Fred and Billy Saunderson had been drinking together.

"How can I counteract the influence that Saunderson is gaining over Fred?" he meditated, as the game went forward.

Evidently he must humor Fred, and not let him get the notion that he was "looking after him."

Chatting with apparent carelessness, he ascertained where they had been.

Meanwhile Billy Saunderson, while seeming engrossed in the game, was taking counsel with his own thoughts.

"Now I suppose that flat thinks nobody sees through his little game," he thought to himself, with a contemptuous glance at Charley. "You innocent lamb, the cards were stocked before you took a hand. Your gentle friend is elected for the green, sure; but I've got to ship you first."

Billy Saunderson played in such a manner that the fight was really between Fred and Charley; and Fred, being a better player than his friend, came off victorious.

"Twon't do! 'twon't do!" exclaimed Billy, with well-feigned regret. "Must have an eye-opener. Set 'em up again, and I'll jerk along the p'ison in a jiffy."

"Nothing for me, if you please, Saunderson," Charley called after him.

"Tut! tut!" replied Billy. "I'll trot it out, and then we can pour it down your throat."

"Come back here and play, and let Johnny fetch it to us," said Fred; but Billy was at the bar chaffing with the attendant, and lighting a cigar.

When the liquor was prepared, Billy took the

waiter and started for his companions. A moment his hand hovered over one of the glasses, and a light powder dropped in and immediately dissolved. Billy passed the liquor round, and as Charley had refused only to induce Fred to do the same, he accepted his.

Fred tossed his off at a gulp. Then he smacked his lips and said:

"That was a double dose, wasn't it?"

"Oh, it's reg'lar p'ison," replied Saunderson, laughing. "Whose turn next?"

And the game was resumed.

As the evening advanced, Fred ordered liquor, although Charley positively refused to drink any more.

Again Billy started off to the bar to light a cigar. While he was gone, Charley took the opportunity to say:

"Fred, don't drink any more. You have had enough."

"Nonsense, Charley. You know water's a very unwholesome beverage on such a warm night as this, and I'm as thirsty as a fish."

"Fred," persisted Charley, "we're old friends, and you won't get vexed at me for speaking my mind. But I wish you wouldn't go with Saunderson so much. You know that his company isn't very elevating, to say the least of it."

"Relieve your mind, old fellow. I'll never find fault with you for it. But you know you always had very straight-laced notions about some things. Now what's the harm in Billy? Ain't he a jolly fellow?"

"That's just it, Fred. He's too jolly for fellows that care any thing about appearances, to say nothing about their own respectability."

"Too severe by half, my dear boy. But here he comes. Discuss the matter with him."

Billy now came up; and as he had been watching the faces of the friends, he guessed pretty nearly what they had been talking about.

"Kick, old boss," he said, mentally; "but I've got the gentle Freddy under my thumb. Bet your bottom dollar on that!"

Fred began to show unmistakable signs of intoxication, and Charley tried to get him to go home, but did not succeed. Finally, the interest in billiards flagging, Billy proposed that they "go a-marching."

"Fred," he said, as they emerged from the billiard saloon, "my grandmother's waiting for me further down the street. I feel it in my bones. Will you go along? It would be a pity to leave the dear old soul waiting any longer."

"No, no, Fred. Hurry home," said Charley, taking his friend's arm.

"Glad to have you go with us; but if you've engagements, why, of course, we'll make allowances, and all that sort of thing," said Saunderson to Charley, taking Fred's other arm. By-by, my noble friend. Fred and I are going to make a night of it. Eh, Freddy, my infant?"

"What's the use, Brewster? We're on the war-path: why not fight it out?" said Fred.

"Come home, Fred," said his friend. "It's late enough already."

"Look-a-here," cried Mr. Saunderson, "how long have you been Fred's ma, that you undertake to drum him in at set hours? I suppose you mean to put him to bed before sundown after this?"

Like every inebriate, Fred fired up at this imputation of dependence.

"Confound it, Mr. Brewster," he cried, with sudden heat, "if you want to go home, why, go home, and be hanged to you! But I feel quite competent to manage my own affairs, yet awhile. I think you're pretty free with your advice, anyway, for one that hasn't been asked."

"That's a trump card," cried Saunderson, approvingly. "No aunts watching over their mother's darling boy in our crowd. All *chassez!*"

And arm-in-arm they started off, leaving Charley burning with indignation.

"If it wasn't for her," he muttered, "I'd drop him altogether. But I hate to see her brother going to the dogs like that. Well, I don't suppose I can do much after this. He's provoked, and won't listen to a word from me."

Meanwhile, Billy and Fred strolled onward until they found themselves in River street. At the door of "The Jungle," Billy commanded:

"File left!"

"Hallo! what's this?" asked Fred, stopping on the threshold.

"Life, my bosom friend—life! We've got to see it all some time. Why not begin to-night? We'll just go in and look on, you know."

He led Fred in, resisting feebly; ordered drinks, and then pushing open a green-baize door, ushered him into an inner room.

The reader is, doubtless, through his reading, familiar enough with the appointments and operation of a faro-bank to render particular description unnecessary.

As our friends entered, Tiger Dick glanced at them with the ordinary interest in new arrivals, and then went on shuffling the cards, without exchanging any sign of recognition with Billy Saunderson. The latter stood aloof with Fred and began to explain the game to him.

Games of chance, like trials of skill, have a fascination for most, if not all men. Who, at our State fairs, has not vied with the oldest turfman in his eagerness to catch the exact instant of time when the winning horse passed under the wire; and who has not felt a glow of sympathy with the fortunate winner at some lottery?

As the players flushed with success or paled at defeat, Fred drew near with awakening interest.

"Hurrah! let's put on a quarter, just to try our luck!" cried Billy, with apparent enthusiasm.

He suited the action to the word, but Fred hung back.

The cards were soon out, and Billy lost.

"Gads!" he cried, with well-feigned chagrin, "the tiger chaws up everything you put into his meat-trap. Well, I'll come again. Double and quits."

He placed half a dollar on the board, and won.

"Whoop!" he cried, in evident delight. "That'll buy five glasses of beer, at any rate. Try your luck, Fred; try your luck, old fellow. The gods will be good to a couple of innocents like us."

Fred tried, at first timidly; then with success came greater boldness, coupled with eagerness, and he played for heavier stakes.

When he had played for some time, Billy got a

warning look from Tiger Dick, and tried to dissuade him from continuing; but the drugged liquor had possession of his brain, and he obstinately persisted. When Billy finally prevailed upon him, he went away with a hundred dollars more in his pocket than when he entered the saloon.

"Egad! my infant, you've outgrown your swaddling-clothes!" cried Billy, slapping him on the back. "Who'd go to Congress after that? Salary grabs are all in the shade. But you always was a lucky card, Fred. Blow me, if I don't believe you was born with your mouth chuck-full of spoons—gold and silver and everything else!"

And Fred exemplified the truth of the adage: "When wine's in, the wit's out." He felt complacent under the praise of his false friend.

CHAPTER II.

A LITTLE OF EVERYTHING.

WHEN May Powell drove up to the bank, on the day subsequent to that on which Cecil first saw Tiger Dick, she found her father at his desk; but with that exception the bank was deserted. A look of disappointment flitted over her face at not seeing Cecil; but, summoning a cheerful smile, she turned to her father.

"Come, papa mine, put up your pen. Haven't you written long enough? Mercy! I should have my fingers all over ink, with half so much writing."

Mr. Powell looked up with a smile.

"Sit down a moment, pet," he said. "Here is the last magazine."

He returned to his writing, and May, settling herself comfortably in an arm-chair, began to read.

"Well, May," said her father, at last, putting his pen on the rack, "I have an appointment just now. Don't you want to drive about a little while, and then call for me again—say in half an hour?"

"Oh, I have something interesting, that will keep me half an hour, if you will be ready in that time. I will wait here until you come back. Are you going far? Take the grays, if you are."

"All right. I guess I will. Amuse yourself until I come back."

The sound of the carriage-wheels had hardly died out, when May let the magazine fall into her lap, and cast a wistful look at Cecil's unoccupied desk.

"If he would only come in," she murmured, and a look of anxious thought came into her eyes.

She arose and went to the window and looked out on the street. Suddenly she started, and a flush of pleasure came into her cheeks. The object of her thoughts was crossing the street toward her.

"Oh, Cecil! how I love you!" she murmured, with clasped hands, devouring him with her eyes.

Then, with a sudden thought, she stepped back from the window, and looked about for a place to hide, so as to give him a surprise. Her eyes fell upon the half-open door of a wardrobe, and the next instant she had stepped in, all a-flutter with pleasure, leaving the door slightly ajar, so that she could watch him through the crevice.

She had hardly secreted herself, when she heard him insert his latch-key. Then he entered and went straight to his desk.

His back was toward her, and May could watch him, without danger of detection. When he had been writing some time, and seemed deeply absorbed in his work, she tip-toed up to him, until she could look over his shoulder.

Before him lay a letter in her father's handwriting, and on another sheet of paper he had copied the signature several times.

"Cecil!"

She laid her hand upon his shoulder.

With a cry of affright, Cecil leaped to his feet, shaking her off violently. Then he stood before her pale and trembling.

"Why, what's the matter, Cecil?" she said, surprised at his excitement.

"Oh, is it you, May?" he replied, with a sickly smile. "How you startled me. I couldn't imagine what it was."

While speaking, he gathered up the papers and slid them into his desk, turning the key.

"How did you get in so quietly? I didn't hear the grays drive up, nor the door open," he said, turning toward her.

"Oh, that's a secret," replied May, laughing archly.

He saw that she had no suspicion of the nature of his work.

"And are you going to keep secrets from me, my own?" he asked, leading her to a seat on the sofa.

"I have a perfect right to, yet awhile," she said, laughing and blushing. And then with a sudden soberness and anxiety, mingled with deprecation for her boldness: "But am I the only guilty one?"

Cecil took her hand, and a look of pain shot athwart his face. He hesitated a moment before speaking, and then said:

"May, I know to what you refer. I confess that yesterday I received one of the severest shocks of my life, and the effect of your coming suddenly upon me to-day shows that I am not yet over it."

He hesitated again, and seemed struggling with painful thoughts.

"Never mind, Cecil, dear," said May. "Say no more. I am sorry that I pained you with my foolish curiosity."

"No, no, May. You have a right to some sort of an explanation; and I cannot well tell you all the circumstances."

Again he hesitated in embarrassment.

"Don't say another word. I don't care a thing about it," said May, with a young girl's ready and implicit confidence in her lover.

"My darling," said Cecil, earnestly, still holding her hands, "in the innocence and retirement of your life, hedged around by the protecting care of parents and friends, you have no conception of the wickedness that a man has to encounter out in the world. The innocent are often called upon to suffer for the acts of the guilty. Will you be content to know that the trouble is averted? I would not sully the whiteness of your pure spirit by telling you its nature, even the knowledge of which must bring contamination with it."

She drew down his head and kissed his pale cheek.

"My poor Cecil," she said, "forgive me for adding to your suffering by senseless curiosity. I am glad that the trouble, whatever it is, threatens you no longer. Try and forget it, dearest."

"And you are satisfied with knowing simply that

it is through no fault of mine?" he asked, drawing her toward him.

"Yes, Cecil; perfectly."

"My darling!" he said, fondly, kissing her brow and stroking her hair.

The phaeton rolled up to the door. Cecil accompanied May to the carriage, handed her in beside her father, took a smiling leave of them, and returned to the office.

"Perdition!" he muttered; "what a narrow escape. But she suspects nothing. Perhaps she did not notice what I was doing? I am treading on dangerous ground, with pitfalls on every side; but, curse it! I'll win all or lose all!"

After dark, while walking an obscure street in disguise—for it would jeopard all of his plans to have the shadow of suspicion thrown upon him, by being seen in questionable company—he was overtaken by Tiger Dick, according to previous arrangement.

"Well, have you got the little joker?" asked the Tiger, playfully.

"There's the paper that is to damn Fred Powers or myself," said Cecil, gloomily.

"Tut! tut! man," replied the Tiger. "Hold up your head. Never say die—that's my motto."

"That's all very well; but I can tell you it's no fool's game we are playing. I came within an ace of being detected in the very first step."

"The deuce you did! How did that happen?"

"My precious sweetheart hid in the wardrobe at the bank—to give me a pleasant surprise, doubtless," with a grimace—"and while I was preparing the paper I have just given you, came and peeped over my shoulder."

"Whew! And what did she say?"

"Say? Nothing. If she had had any suspicions, you don't suppose I'd be fool enough to persist in the plot?"

"Of course not. But how did you pull the wool over her eyes?"

"Why, I played the role of a martyr, persecuted for another's fault. In carrying out the plot, I had to make a scarecrow of you; but I doubt whether I painted you any blacker than reality."

"Ha! ha!" laughed the Tiger. "A little smut more or less won't make any difference with your character or mine, will it? But how did the horns with which you were pleased to endow me account for what you were doing?"

"It only accounted for a very natural display of emotion, at her sudden announcement of herself. I confess that I jumped as if a small battery of howitzers had unexpectedly exploded at my feet. That was nervousness, consequent upon having met an old enemy on the evening previous. She had no suspicions with regard to the writing, if she noticed it at all."

"Ha! ha! ha! So she gave you a start, did she? Well, all's well that ends well. By the way, I have not been idle. Billy Saunderson has your future brother-in-law under his wing, and I expect to extend the hospitalities of my house to him in three or four hours from this time. They are now out at the Dutch Gardens."

"Indeed? Have you seen them?"

"Oh, no," replied the Tiger, with a light laugh. Cecil turned upon him with a look of inquiry.

"Very little goes on in which I have an interest, that I don't get an inkling of, one way or another," said the Tiger, with a significant smile.

"I believe you," replied Cecil, with a suppressed shudder. He felt that his own actions were constantly under a special espionage.

"Well," pursued the Tiger, "you will be warned when this is cashed, and must be prepared for its arrival. By the way, I have another scheme on the boards, which, besides furthering this plot, promises immediate results, in a pecuniary way. It's only in embryo now, but when I get all the pins up, I'll let you know. Until then, adieu!"

"Curse him!" muttered Cecil, when the Tiger was gone; "his brain is ever teeming with devilment. I wonder what is coming next."

As he walked on, his mind turned to a feature of his plot in which the Tiger was not embraced.

"There is one step that must not be neglected," he mused. "I must repair the blunder of losing my head, when Florence rejected my love. I should have kept friends with her, at any cost."

He had an opportunity a day or two later, when he met her at Mr. Powell's residence. Coming upon her in the garden, he detained her, as she was about to turn away, to avoid meeting him.

"Miss Goldthorp," he said, humbly, "I believe that you will be generous enough to accept an apology for my rudeness to you, two or three days since. I beg that you will let the sufferings of the moment plead my excuse. If you would have evidence of its intensity, it has left its marks in my face and in the weakness of my yet tremulous frame. Such a moment comes to a man but once in a lifetime."

He stood before her apparently bowed with humiliation, yet quivering with suppressed emotion, not daring to look at her. His cheeks were pale and thin, his eyes sunken, and his hands tremulous with the unsteadiness of nervous weakness. He had the appearance of a man just up from a bed of sickness; and Florence, not knowing the terror and suspense that had racked him, attributing it all to disappointed love for her, did what any other woman would have done—pitied him—forgave him.

"Mr. Beaumont," she said, "I accept your apology; and to show you that I do so without reserve, I assure you that I shall always feel for you that friendship which I then offered you."

"Do you?" he asked, looking up eagerly. "It is more than I deserve. I dared not ask it. But, seeing that you have volunteered, will you give me your hand on it?"

"Willingly," she replied, extending her hand.

He sprung forward with a glad sparkle in his eye and a panting in his breath. She felt his hand tremble as his fingers closed over hers. Of whatever falsehood and duplicity Cecil Beaumont was guilty, there was no question as to the genuineness of his love for Florence Goldthorp.

"God bless you, Miss Goldthorp!" he said, his eyes humid with feeling. "Forgive me, if I say that every new phase of your character makes me love you more and more. Do not be offended. I may never speak so to you again. Will you permit me?—it's a poor boon for such a love as mine."

He bent and touched his lips to her hand. Then he dropped it, and then, his eyes blood-shot and

swimming in tears, his nostrils quivering, he drew himself up, and stood erect before her, as if defying her to resent what he had done.

"It can only be painful to both of us to prolong this interview," Mr. Beaumont, said Florence, gently, much moved by his display of emotion. "Let me say good-by."

She swept him an adieu and left him bowed beneath the weight of his misery.

As the sound of her retreating footsteps died out, Cecil roused himself and strode away with the blind impetuosity of wretchedness, obeying the instinct that seeks relief in motion.

Mr. Powell's residence, like that of Florence's uncle, was situated on the confluent of the Mississippi, only nearer their junction, and consequently nearer town. Following its course upward about a mile, Cecil came to a bend, formed by a bluff, round which the stream flowed, rising abruptly from the plain on the river side, and sloping gradually the other way. At the foot of this promontory-like bluff, the channel of the river was full thirty feet deep. In consequence of a suicide at this point the bluff had acquired the name of Dead Man's Bluff, and the depression in the river-bed, Dead Man's Hole.

Here Cecil Beaumont struggled with his disappointment and jealousy.

"By heaven! he shall never marry her!" he cried, with clenched fists. "I'll sink him in infamy deeper than the bottomless pit, before he shall call a hair of her head his own! If that fails, I'll kill him!—curse him! I'll kill him!"

It was the old struggle over again, and it was midnight before he had fought it out. Then he went home, to feverish unrest and horrible nightmare.

The next day May Powell confronted him with a look in her eyes that he had never seen there before.

"What is the meaning of this, Cecil?" she said, in a constrained tone of voice. "Florence Goldthorp comes into the house in unexplainable agitation, and you are as unaccountably spirited off, when we have every reason to expect that we are to be honored with your presence; or, in case of emergency, that you will at least find time to make your adieux."

"Why, May, what is the matter with you?" asked Cecil, apparently in bewilderment, but really to gain time.

"Isn't it plain that I am honoring you and myself, by suspecting you of flirting with my friend?—or with me?"

The first was spoken with flushed impatience; the last with pale jealousy.

"Why, my little girl," cried Cecil, smiling, now complete master of himself, "you never were more mistaken in your life."

He took her in his arms and kissed her and patted her cheek and laughed at her as if she were a naughty child.

"What! jealous of Florence Goldthorp? Why, my little darling, how absurd!"

"Oh, Cecil! I am mistaken, and you don't care for her—not a bit?—not a bit, Cecil? Oh! I should die if I knew you had a thought that was not all my own!"

She clung to him, tearful and panting, and in his assurances of loyalty and gentle chidings at her suspicious, forgot to get an explanation of his unexpected disappearance.

CHAPTER III.

A FALSE FRIEND.

We have anticipated, in order to bring into consecutive review those incidents between which there is a natural association. We must now go back to the day subsequent to Fred Powell's initiation into the mysteries of THE JUNGLE.

All day long a cloud had rested on Mr. Powell's face; and Cecil, watching him, guessed at the truth, and was in a measure prepared for what was to come. After all the clerks had taken their leave, the banker fussed about his desk a little while, and then nervously clearing his throat, turned toward Cecil, and began:

"Mr. Beaumont, during the few years of our acquaintance I have found you a man in every way worthy of confidence; and I now feel as if I could approach you as a friend. I wish to consult you on a very embarrassing subject—one that is full of pain for me, as a parent."

Mr. Powell hesitated, and nervously rearranged some papers on his desk. Cecil Beaumont cast a quick glance at him. From the way in which he began, Cecil was in doubt as to the drift of his words. He replied in a voice modulated to sympathetic tones:

"I am truly grateful, sir, for your estimate of me, and for the confidence you are pleased to repose in me. Believe me, I shall be only too happy to be of service to you in any way in my power."

"It is about my son," pursued Mr. Powell, with increasing perturbation. "I wish to inquire into his associations. You are a young man, Mr. Beaumont, and more or less familiar with the manner of life of other young men about you. Furthermore, you, not being related to Frederick, would have ready access to facts concerning him which would be withheld from me, as his father, even if I could bring myself to the humiliation of publishing my anxiety about him, by applying to my friends."

The father stopped with flushed face and averted eyes. Cecil coughed slightly, and seemed almost as much embarrassed as the elder man.

"You know, sir," he said, hesitatingly, "that I am not much of a hand to go around—I keep to myself a great deal—and therefore am not so familiar with Frederick as another in my place would be likely to be. But if you could intimate the line of inquiry, sir—what you wish to know about him—"

And, leaving the sentence incomplete, Cecil looked up at his employer, apparently in helpless embarrassment.

A paroxysm of pain shot athwart Mr. Powell's face; but he set his lips firmly, and said:

"Last night he was brought home in a state of intoxication. This is the first case that has come to my knowledge—the first intimation that his habits were not what they should be. Men do not leap at a bound into dissipation, Mr. Beaumont. There must have been introductory steps. I wish to ascertain through you, if you will lend me your as-

sistance, to what extent this has been carried, who are his intimates, and how long he has been under their pernicious influence."

A covert gleam of malicious triumph shot from Cecil's eyes; but he replied in a tone of earnest commiseration:

"I cannot express to you, sir, the pain it gives me to hear you speak as you have. It would be unjust to you, and perhaps prejudicial to Frederick, to hide from you that I have for some time deprecated the company with which your son has seen fit to associate; but I did not dream that he would so far forget himself as your words imply."

"It is playing with edge-tools," Mr. Beaumont, replied the parent, with a tremor in his voice and tears in his eyes. "No man is safe, but he who abstains absolutely from the use of intoxicating liquors. I would rather bury the boy to-day, as dearly as I love him, than to see him grow up to a life of degradation and a grave of shame—the slave of a hellish appetite, that knows no satiety."

He bowed his head upon the desk, and his frame quivered with suppressed emotion. It was a sight to move the coldest heart; but Cecil saw in it only the opportunity it afforded to destroy his rival.

Presently the father mastered his emotions, and, looking up, said:

"Mr. Beaumont, I may rely upon you to look into this matter as a friend?"

"I feel it my duty to help you, Mr. Powell, though it is a hard part to play. I shall feel so like a spy and informer; but my interest in the real welfare of your son will enable me to put aside this feeling which I believe to be a mistaken notion of honor."

"Your high sense of honor does you credit; but, as you say, the motive is the true criterion. A friend and a father can work together only for the boy's well-being."

"By the way, sir, here is one of Frederick's chums now, crossing the street. Perhaps we can get some information from him. If you will just step into the bedroom, and leave the door ajar, I will call him in and converse with him about the matter. He is Brown & Thurlow's bookkeeper, and we have some papers that are to go to them."

Mr. Powell glanced out of the window and saw Billy Saunderson approaching. A shadow passed over his face, and with a heavy heart he stepped into the bedroom.

Cecil tapped on the window-pane and beckoned to the "decoy duck." A moment afterward that worthy entered, with his customary swagger.

"Howdy, little one," he said. "What's the row?"

"These papers are just in readiness; and, as you were passing, I thought I might as well let you have them now as in the morning—if you are going to the store?"

"You're a gentleman and a scholar, and a good judge of whisky! My noble friend, there is just where I'm going."

"Not in a hurry, are you? Have a cigar and be a little neighborly."

"Did you ever see me in a hurry, pard, or when I wouldn't smoke? Throw a whole box at me. There's just one advantage that Old Nick has over an American citizen—he's never at inconvenience for a light. Just hit me with a match, if you please."

Cecil complied, (not literally!) and then said:

"By the way, Saunderson, where have you kept yourself of late? Were you at the theater last night? They have some very fine talent, for once in a way."

"Nary theater, ole man. I was paying homage to old Nick last night."

"In what particular way?"

"Oh, drowning trouble; but the trouble beat me I'll confess."

"Do I understand you to say that you got intoxicated?"

"My pippin, you shock me by the use of such a vulgar term! Now I am classical in my expressions—always. You should have asked: 'Am I to infer that you got outside of too much tanglefoot?' or: 'Do you mean to imply that the sidewalk was dancing a redowa, when you came home at dewy morn?' My reply would have been: 'My bosom friend, you're a-cluckin' loud, and a mighty narrow sidewalk at that!'"

"I will heed your instructions in future. But did your companions find the sidewalk so narrow?"

"Look-a-here, pard; you don't mean to insinuate that I was the only exalted one of the party! No, sir! I'd scorn such an imputation of selfishness. Inspiration is plenty enough, so that a whole party may become prophets."

"Far be it from me to attribute such unworthiness to one of your acknowledged generosity. But how large a party of prophets did you have?"

"Only three of us. The gentle Freddy, myself and the lamp-post. We were a high old trinity, you bet."

"Freddy? Not Fred Powell?"

"Who else? But look-a-here, my bow-legged bantam, of course I know you're as close as an oyster; but if the walls should whisper the tender tale, so that it came to the ears of his gov'nor, wouldn't it kick up a row?"

"But does Fred ever drink?—that is, to excess, I mean."

"Drink? Would you have him go thirsty? Water's very injurious this warm weather, you know. It does very well for navigating purposes; but as a beverage—ugh!"

"Yes; but one may observe moderation."

"Oh, he's moderate—very. You ought to have seen him at the Dutch Gardens last night. Ha! ha! They're talking of enlarging their accommodations. Fred can spoil more of Germany's Hope than any kid of his inches inside of seven contiguous counties."

"You must have been a hilarious company on your way back to town."

"Hilarious? Now you're hitting me near home. I can sing like a lark; and Fred—his voice is just beautiful!"

"And what time did you get back, pray tell?"

"Oh we didn't stay out there long. We came back in the shank of the evening. Then we had a set to at billiards, and after that went to River street and threw away our money. That is to say, I did; but Fred—he's a two-horse team and a blind mule into the bargain. Oh, hush! but he's just lined his pockets with the yellow boys! Of course that's a figure of speech in these days of inflation."

"Let me understand you. There are so many ways of throwing away money."

"Oh, we bestowed it on charity, you know."

"Aren't you a little ambiguous in your choice of expression?" asked Cecil with a smile.

"What, don't you twig?"

"I can't say that I do, if that means understand."

"Oh, you're innocent, you are. Why don't you write Sunday-school books?"

"Isn't there some simpler form of expression in which you might couch your ideas, so as to bring them within the compass of ordinary understanding?"

"Not up in the technicalities? Oh, well, Fred and I went to bucking the tiger just for amusement; and he pared his nails handsome, I can tell you!"

"You don't mean to say that Fred gambled—actually gambled?"

"Oh! oh! oh! When will you get beyond such unpardonable vulgarity? Now I don't say that he gambled. No, sir; I never use so uncouth a term. I say he negotiated a loan of a cool hundred at the bank of Tiger Dick. Hallo! what's that? It sounded like somebody groaning. Gads! if Fred's old gov'nor should drop in on our solitude and hear my eulogium on his dutiful son, wouldn't it make his eyes stick out! But I must jog along. I don't know but I've been wagging my jaw too much already. By-by!"

And the "decoy-duck," repenting after the mischief was done, took himself off.

"By Jove! he couldn't have played into my hands more completely. The fellow's been drinking again to-day," was Cecil's mental observation; but he turned toward the bedroom door with a look of sympathetic grief. No sound came from the room, however; nor did Mr. Powell appear.

Cecil turned to his desk and resumed his writing.

Half an hour afterward, Mr. Powell came out of the bedroom. His eyes were red with weeping, such tears as a father will shed over the ruin of an only son, and his form seemed bent beneath the weight of sorrow that rested on him.

"My friend," he said, grasping Cecil's hand, "I thank you for the aid you have given me. Volumes could not tell me more than I have learned during these few minutes. It was a bitter draught; but now I know the whole truth, and can take steps to remedy the evil."

"Mr. Powell," said Cecil, in a feeling tone, "I cannot express the pain it has given me to inflict this suffering upon you. But I felt that it was better to draw the whole truth out of him, if possible."

"You are right. I wished to know the whole truth."

Then Mr. Powell bathed his face and removed the evidences of his grief, so that when May came for him with the carriage he was composed enough to go out on the street.

"Tally ho!" cried Cecil, in exultation, as the carriage disappeared around the corner. "Oh, I'll bring down my fine gentleman! It's but a step from gambling to forgery. I'll put him through the mill, without mercy. She will never marry a man branded with felony."

That evening Mr. Powell and Fred were closeted together for an hour. When Fred came out, he looked like a man thoroughly ashamed of himself.

May met him in the hall as he was taking down his hat, and laying her hand on his arm, and looking pleadingly in his face, she said:

"Are you going out to-night, Fred? Stay with me, and I will play and sing to you."

"Sis, don't you begin," said her brother, with a slight show of impatience. "When a fellow tumbles into the mud, he doesn't need to be told of it by every one he meets. I've had about all I can stand for one night, and guess I'll get along without 'the gentle influences of home,' and that sort of thing."

He went out, pulling his hat over his eyes moodily.

"If he was only more like Cecil!" murmured his sister, watching him with tears in her eyes.

How distorted is the view that one soul gains of another through the agency of our imperfect senses! Half an hour afterward Fred met Billy Saunderson on the street.

"Ye gods, what a face!" cried the "decoy duck." "Are you going to be measured for your shroud, or has your Dulcinea jilted you for a soldier? You look like a whipped cur on a rainy day."

"Spare your compliments, Saunderson, until you find some one more in a humor for them," said Fred, without a smile.

"Humor be hanged! Come in and take an enlivener."

"Nothing for me, Billy."

"What! Nothing cheerful?"

"Nothing."

"Eh? Pugh! you're joking."

"Never was more serious in my life."

Billy looked at his friend inquiringly. Fred was frowning gloomily.

"Look a-here, boss," said the "decoy," "I pass. What are you going to make it? Haven't joined the Good Templars?"

Billy grinned at the idea.

"No Templars in mine," replied Fred.

"Swore off with somebody, perhaps? Very foolish practice. Have to place your whole dependence on water this warm weather. Too thin!"

"I haven't sworn off. Confound it, man! somebody's blowed to the governor. He knows the whole story—Tiger Dick and all."

"The gentleman in black he does!"

"Some blabbing booby has dipped in his oar where it wasn't needed. I knew well enough that I had made a fool of myself, without a lecture on the subject. I don't see how I came to lose my head. Otherwise I should never have gone to such a place."

"Mixed drinks, my bosom friend. Guess I was a little boosy myself. Feel kind of queer about the head-piece yet. But say, Fred, what kind of a swell is that cashier of yours? Would he throw the veil of charity over your little peccadilloes, if they accidentally came to his knowledge?"

"Not he!" replied Fred, with sudden interest.

He felt, instinctively, that there was a rivalry between Cecil and himself for the favor of Florence Goldthorp.

"Then I guess he blabbed to the governor."

"But how did he know anything about it?—even to the amount that I won?"

"Friend of my youth, I don't try to screen myself—not a bit. In the cause of temperance, we

destroyed some regular prison, lest it should ensnare the innocent and unwary. Perhaps I was a little over-zealous; any way, I tried to do my whole duty. Then, in the moment of my weakness, that snake-in-the-grass inveigled me into his stronghold, or in other words, the bank, and pumped me dry. As I said before, I don't try to screen myself. I confided in him as in the friend of my bosom. But, Fred, you know I didn't mean to give you away. How could I know that he was such a sneak?"

Fred frowned angrily.

"I thought you knew enough to keep your tongue between your teeth," he said.

"Sorry, Fred—deuced sorry; but you know I wouldn't sell you out. And I have been honest about it. Made a clean breast of it, when I might have observed a judicious silence and saved my credit. You can't deny that."

"Oh, it's all right," said Fred. "Good-evening." And he walked off with his hands in his pockets.

"Heigho!" sighed the "decoy," disconsolately. "Here's a pretty kettle of fish. Tiger Dick pays me to introduce a young gent, and then I let my infernal tongue dish the whole thing. Gads! he'll ship me, if he finds out what a confounded bungler I've been. Well, I've learned a lesson; I won't be as frank with him as with Fred."

He didn't know that he had been playing into Tiger Dick's hands in the best manner possible.

CHAPTER IV. A DOUBLE PLOT.

SEVERAL days subsequent to the events narrated in the last chapter, Cecil Beaumont sat at his desk alone. There was the old look of weariness and despair on his face. His cheeks were pale and haggard.

He let his head drop upon his arm, the picture of dejection.

"Oh, curse it all!" he muttered, bitterly; "I wish I was dead. I am making a hell of my life—and for what?"

"All that I put into that infernal speculation only sinks the rest deeper. Luck is dead against me. Grain will never come up, until I get out of it. Well, I've played my last card. I dare not take any more. Detection may come any day—even to-morrow, and then the thing's all gone to smash. Well, I don't care. Any thing's better than this eternal worry."

"I'd emigrate some fine morning, but that human tiger watches me as a cat watches a mouse. Some of his infernal spies are at my elbow at every tack and turn. If he suspected as much as a thought of breaking faith with him, I might as well get measured for my coffin. He'd supply the rope and hangman. There's only one way of getting out of his clutches."

He shuddered, thinking of suicide as the only means of escape.

After a while he thrust the paper before him into his desk, and turning out the gas, left the bank.

In the comparative gloom, midway between two lamp-posts, and before some wholesale houses that were closed and dark, a paper was thrust into Cecil's hand. At the same moment a man brushed by him and passed on down the street at a rapid walk.

There were others passing and repassing; but this man had come so near as to nearly touch him; and, without stopping to look at the paper, Cecil resolved to follow him.

He had a sachel in his hand and a shawl thrown across his arm. He went directly to the depot, purchased a ticket, boarded the train, put his hat in the rack, and composed himself for slumber. The train moved off, and Cecil realized that he was "sold"—he had followed the wrong man.

Stepping into the waiting-room, Cecil unfolded the paper and read as follows:

"My dear Prince:—I am dying to see you. Come without delay. I have the pins arranged for a ten-strike. This will be delivered by a messenger of the
GENTLE RICHARD."

Half an hour afterward, Cecil Beaumont, disguised as before, sat in the presence of Tiger Dick.

"Well, what's wanted?" he asked, looking straight before him, with his arms resting on the table.

"I've been thinking," said Tiger Dick, "that our little game ain't the surest thing in the world. We've got to wait too long for results. Now, the lady may die, or the old gent may decline to drop off the hooks. Either contingency would be disastrous to us. While we're waiting for dinner, we want something to stay our stomachs, eh?"

"We may want a great many things," replied Cecil, gloomily.

"How would you like from twenty-five to a hundred thousand dollars in your pocket, say this day week?" asked the Tiger, looking through the smoke of his cigar at Cecil.

The cashier looked up with a flash of interest.

"Where can you get that amount?" he asked, incredulously.

"What would you do for such a prize?" asked the Tiger.

"Sell my soul!" declared the cashier, with sudden vehemence.

"Hallo!" mused the Tiger, with a searching glance at the other. "What's the row, now?" Then, noticing that Cecil seemed embarrassed at his sudden outburst, he added, mentally: "Guess he showed his hand when he didn't mean to."

But he said aloud, with a laugh:

"Is it clear of incumbency?"

"I guess the devil has a pretty heavy mortgage on both of us. But, to return to business: from off what bush are you going to pick twenty-five or a hundred thousand dollars?"

"Answer me a few questions, first. The gentle Freddy carries a key to the bank, does he not?"

"Yes."

"Who sleeps there nights?"

"The janitor."

"An old man?"

"Yes; but not an infant in muscle, for all that."

"Bother his muscle. That's of no account. Does anybody else ever sleep there?"

"I have a room there, which I occupy sometimes, when we are very busy."

"Hurrah!" cried the Tiger, almost leaping from his seat, in the enthusiasm with which he received the announcement. "By Jove! that's a trump card! Hold on, pard, don't deal any more until I put on my thinking-cap for a moment!"

He scratched his head and thought eagerly; then he struck the table with his fist.

"Just the card!" he cried, exultingly. "That simplifies the whole thing. Nothing would be thought of your occupying the room any night just now?"

"No. We are very busy just now, and next week we will have to make out our yearly statement."

"Dumped right at our door, by jingo! Oh! the devil helps his own, there's no mistake about it! Pard, where does that janitor sleep?"

"He has a sofa bedstead within ten feet of the vault."

"In plain sight of the strong box?"

"Yes."

"Pard, there's where that twenty-five or a hundred thousand dollars lies ready to our hand!"

Tiger Dick leaned across the table, and fastened his eyes upon Cecil's face. The cashier drew back with a sudden flush.

"Do you propose to rob the bank?" he asked, in a suppressed voice.

"Oh, no!" replied the Tiger, with a laugh. "Only negotiating a loan, you know. But, have you any qualms of conscience?" he added, with a sneer.

"It's a bold game," replied Cecil, "and I have no particular ambition to break stone or peg shoes for the next ten or fifteen years."

"Are you afraid?" asked the Tiger, with a curling lip. "But, nothing will be required of you but to play the hero overpowered by numbers."

"And the janitor?"

"That's just the king-pin of the whole plot. We couldn't dispense with him in any way. Here's our little game."

And while Cecil listened attentively, Tiger Dick unfolded the scheme in detail.

"Won't that hold water?" he asked, when he had concluded.

Cecil Beaumont sat with tightly-compressed lips, panting breath, and eyes whose flashing fire was hidden beneath their drooping lids. Here was an opportunity to cover up his defalcations beyond the chance of detection. With the success of this plot, he would cast his most galling chain, and stand forth a comparatively free man. Yet he did not wish to seem to yield too readily.

"I confess that I have but little stomach for this kind of business," he said, with a frown, as of impatience.

"Look-a-here, pard," said the Tiger, in a measured tone. "Do you want to do a little neighborly kindness to the cad who sports the black-eyed Peri? Don't you see that this little set-to with the tiger, his signing his governor's name to loose bits of paper, and his share in this little amusement, are all of a stripe, and will sink him lower than Tartarus? Ain't that just what we want? And if a few thousands come in incidentally, who's going to curse his luck on that account?"

Cecil Beaumont drew his breath hard through his set teeth, his nostrils quivered, and his eyes fairly blazed. The crimson tide surged up to his forehead, and then surged back to his heart, leaving his face livid with jealous hatred.

"I will do my part," he said, in a choking voice.

"Appoint your time."

"Aha!" was the Tiger's mental reflection on the storm of passion he had awakened in the other.

"That's a tender spot. But I hold a hand in that little game, too, as you'll find, some of these fine days."

He said aloud:

"I haven't made all my arrangements yet. I wanted to see the way clear first. I'll sound Billy Sanderson. I guess he's prime. He likes money, like the rest of us. And of late he appears to have something on his mind. If I might venture to guess, I'd say that he was in debt to Messrs. Brown & Thurlow, without their knowledge. If so, we've got him."

A flush came into Cecil's face at the Tiger's suspicions, and he arose, saying:

"Well, if this is all, you can count on me as soon as you are ready—and the sooner the better."

Later in the evening, Tiger Dick and the "decoy duck" sat on opposite sides of the same little table in the Tiger's sanctum. For half an hour the Tiger had been chatting and plying his subordinate with liquor. Now, considering him in proper condition, he broached the subject for which what had gone before was a preparation.

"Billy, you have no particular antipathy for the recognized medium of exchange?"

"Oh, hush, pard! Knock me down with some of the root!" replied Mr. Sanderson, with a pathetic cadence in his maudlin voice.

"Are you hard pressed, Billy?" asked the Tiger, with friendly interest.

"Pard, I'm just a hanging-on with teeth and toenails," replied the "decoy-duck," in a confidential, almost pleading tone.

"I guess I've got a little job for you, boss."

"Have you, my bosom friend? It's a straw to a drowning man, I assure you. If you can give me a lift now, I'll be your aunt Hannah for a twelve-month—s'elp me Bob, I will!"

"Can you keep a close tongue in your head?" asked the Tiger.

"Pard, I'm as close as a bandbox!" asseverated Mr. Sanderson, stoutly, though he secretly winced, recollecting his recent lapse in that particular.

"How would you like a cool hundred?" asked the Tiger, carelessly.

"The deuce!" cried Billy, leaping to his feet, almost sobered by his astonishment and delight. A hundred dollars meant a great deal to him just then.

"Sit down and take something to cool off on," said Dick, with a flash of triumph, pushing the decanter toward his excited companion.

Billy resumed his seat and tossed off the liquor hurriedly.

"What's the trumps, pard?" he asked, looking inquiringly at the Tiger.

Tiger Dick drew a little volume from a drawer under the table, and slid it across to the "decoy duck."

"Do you know what this is?" he asked.

"The deuce—the Bible!" exclaimed Billy, examining the book in bewilderment. "Queer kind of literature for this shop, ain't it, pard? or do you devote your leisure to its perusal?"

"Never you mind what I do with it. I have a use for it now. I want you to hold it in your hand and repeat some words after me."

"Hold on, pard. How do I know that you ain't going to make me swear away my patrimony for a mess of pottage, or come the Ku-klux dodge on me, or something of that sort?"

"If we come to anything you don't want to stick to, you can stop and back out at any time. But remember there's a hundred dollars begging you to take charge of it."

"That's fair enough, by hoky! Deal away, pard—deal away."

"By this book which I hold in my hand," dictated the Tiger.

"By this book which I hold in my hand," repeated the "decoy."

"I do solemnly swear—"

"I do solemnly swear—"

"Never to reveal, by word of mouth, writing, look, sign, or in any other manner—"

"Never to reveal, by word of mouth, writing, look, sign, or in any other manner—"

"The proposition made to me this night, nor anything pertaining thereto."

"The proposition made to me this night, nor anything pertaining thereto."

"And I do solemnly swear that, if I accept the proposition—"

"And I do solemnly swear that, if I accept the proposition—"

"I will never, by word of mouth, writing, or in any other manner—"

"I will never, by word of mouth, writing, or in any other manner—"

"Confess my own act in pursuance thereof—"

"Confess my own act in pursuance thereof—"

"Nor in any way refer to anything that may flow, or may seem to flow from, or be connected with my act—"

"Nor in any way refer to anything that may flow, or may seem to flow from, or be connected with my act—"

"In such a manner as to throw suspicion upon any person or persons whom I may believe to be concerned in any transaction connected with my act—"

"Let up, pard. I can't crack that nut. Let's make the journey by short stages, over such rough ground," said Billy, breaking off.

Tiger Dick repeated it for him, phrase by phrase, and then continued:

"Nor in a manner calculated to awaken the suspicion that the facts are not such as they appear—"

"Nor in a manner calculated to awaken the suspicion that the facts are not such as they appear—"

"So help me God!"

"So help me God!"

"Now kiss the book."

Billy complied, laying it on the table with the remark:

"That's a tight one, old boss. Gads! I won't be able to so much as lift an eye-winker, after this."

"I want it tight," replied the Tiger, grimly.

"And, my friend, here's another titbit for you to ruminate. If you ever break faith with me by so much as a breath, your life won't be worth a toss. In the Rocky Mountain country, men learned that Tiger Dick wasn't to be played with."

"No fear of me, Cap. Drive ahead. What do you want me to do?"

Tiger Dick explained to Billy Sanderson the part he wished him to play. When he was through, the "decoy duck" puckered up his face and said:

"I say, boss, wasn't that a big noise for the amount of damage done? From that trifle of an oath that you imposed on me, I thought you wanted me to massacre the President and his cabinet, and fetch off the Capitol in my breeches-pocket."

"Stow your thoughts. Do you accept the proposition?"

"For a hundred? Hoi! Cap, you're joking. I wish I could get a hundred dollars for every act of mine that troubled my conscience more than that will. Accept? You bet!"

"All right. When you have accomplished your part, tie this bit of ribbon in your buttonhole, and walk from your hotel to the next corner and back. That's all I ask of you. When you get home, you'll find the hundred dollars where you won't have long to look for it."

CHAPTER V. A QUARREL.

"Sis, have you made an engagement for the picnic?" asked Fred Powell, several days before the event was to take place.

"Yes; with Mr. Beaumont," replied May.

Fred frowned impatiently.

"Can't you go anywhere without him?" he asked.

"Why shouldn't I go with Mr. Beaumont?" asked May, looking up in some surprise.

"Oh, I suppose he is as good as anybody. You have only your own taste to please."

"Fred, why do you dislike Mr. Beaumont? Has he ever injured you in any way?"

"I dislike him? No, indeed; he is wholly indifferent to me."

And Fred donned his hat and went out whistling, with his hands in his pockets.

"Fred is unjust to Cecil," said May to herself.

"And Cecil is too proud to attempt to propitiate him; but I know that he bears him no ill will. He would not harbor resentment against him a moment—my noble Cecil!"

And she turned to the trifle of fancy work she was doing, with a dreamy look in her blue eyes.

The day came at last, with its sunshine and odor of wild roses. Dead Man's Bluff was a scene of rare festivity. The flutter of gay robes, as some laughing girl shot through the air in the oscillating swing, or ran down some woodland path, darting arch glances over her shoulder at her pursuing lover; the click of mallet against croquet-ball; the snowy cloths laid on the sward, loaded with the contents of the now-empty hampers; the gay hammocks, stretched between the trees, with their occupants as languid and as lovely as any Orient queen; and out on the smoothly-gliding river, the bellying sails, and coming over the limpid tide, the sound of lute attuned to a bell-like voice; all combined in a harmony of sights and sounds fit to move an anchorite.

Happiest of all that gay throng was May Powell. With Cecil at her side, she forgot their surroundings, and only felt a delicious thrill of pleasure in listening to the tones of his voice.

Through the shadowy vistas they passed, arm in arm, over the velvet turf and beneath the great oaks that stretched their giant arms above them, as if in benediction.

Through a break in the foliage, Cecil caught sight of a boat passing near.

"Hallo! Corville," he called to the rower; "aren't you going to give us a chance?"

"Certainly. Come down to the landing," was the cheerful reply, and the boat's head was turned toward the flag-decked pier.

"Hallo, Corville; just in time," said Fred Powell, as the boat ran alongside the landing, and the young man leaped out. "Come, Miss Flo, jump in, and we'll catch those runaways before they get half across the pond."

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Powell," said Cecil, now appearing on the scene; "but I believe that Mr. Corville yields the boat to Miss Powell and myself."

Fred turned toward Cecil and looked at him from head to foot, with a contemptuous flash in his eyes; then drawing the boat close up to the wharf, said:

"First come, first served. That would seem to be fair. Come Miss Goldthorp, we are losing time."

It was evident that he had been drinking more wine than was good for him. He had reached that point where the discipline and breeding of the gentleman are lost in the stubborn self-will of the man. He had had a race to the landing with a previous party, who had forestalled him in getting a boat. He would not now be thwarted again, and by a man whom he so cordially disliked. So, throwing aside all questions of right and courtesy, he extended his hand to help Florence into the skiff.

Mr. Corville now interposed.

"Perhaps I ought to say that Mr. Beaumont spoke to me and engaged the boat. It was to give it up to him that I brought it in."

"Mr. Corville, are you through with the boat?" asked Fred, turning upon him.

"Certainly."

"Well, that seems to end the matter. You brought it in, and I was the first to take it. We acknowledge no privileged class here. Miss Goldthorp, will you allow me to assist you in?"

"Perhaps we had better yield—" began Florence.

"Do you refuse to go?" demanded her escort, hotly.

"Mr. Powell," said Cecil, "it seems to me that the right of this matter is quite apparent to any one who is willing to consider it fairly. Mr. Corville had possession of the boat, and at my request brought it in out of compliment to Miss Powell. Of course your being in waiting for a boat could not affect Mr. Corville's right to transfer the one in his possession to any one he pleased."

"I do not care to discuss the matter with you, Mr. Beaumont. I have the boat by right of precedence; and that is enough for me."

"I am afraid I shall have to maintain the rights of the lady to whom the boat was yielded," said Cecil, with quiet determination; but there was a slumbrous fire in his eye, as he laid his hand on the painter.

"Take your hand off from there, or I'll knock you into the water!" fulminated Fred, bursting with rage.

A crimson wave of anger surged up into Cecil's face and then receded, leaving it pale and with deeply-marked lines about the mouth. There was a steely glitter in his eyes, and a rigid tension of all the muscles of his frame, that would have marked him as a dangerous man to one less observing than Fred Powell; but the latter, too, was an athlete in build and training, and feared no man.

May Powell had been standing with flashing eyes and an indignant flush in her cheeks. She now stepped between the combatants and addressed her brother.

"Fred Powell," she said, "you are ungentlemanly. This is an outrage. Even if we had not the indisputable right to the skiff, you have conducted yourself from the first like a boor. Apologize to Mr. Beaumont, instantly!"

There was something of the ludicrous in the commanding tone which this little woman took with her brother, and some of the auditors smiled. It nettled Fred more than ever.

"Sis," he cried, "will you please to keep your oar out of these troubled waters? Of course I will comply with your very reasonable demand, at some future day, when I have nothing better on hand."

She turned her back on him.

"Mr. Beaumont," she said, "you at least, have the gentlemanly courtesy to terminate this shameful scene, even at the sacrifice of our rights?"

"Miss Powell," he replied, calmly, though his whole frame was aquiver with suppressed emotion, "I hold myself subject to your commands. Will you accept my arm?"

She took it with a grateful look that would have rewarded him for everything, had he truly loved her; but he saw Florence Goldthorp draw aside her skirts and stand coldly to let them pass, and in his heart that look awoke the fires of hell.

Carrying his point brought no satisfaction to Fred Powell. He felt that he had lowered himself in the estimation of all about him; while in yielding the field, Cecil had gained the victory. Even to Florence, when she had time for reflection, he must appear at a disadvantage.

"Beaumont, have our boat," called out a cheerful voice.

A skiff grazed the pier; Charley Brewster leaped out, assisted his lady from the boat, and turning to May Powell, with a bow, said:

"Miss Powell, will you oblige me by taking our place?"

May rewarded him with a smile that sent a glow to his heart, such as it had never experienced before—a smile that lived in his memory for many a week after.

Cecil saw his opportunity, and, thanking Brewster, assisted May into the stern-sheets, leaped aboard and pushed off, outwardly as undisturbed as if nothing unusual had happened.

A momentary hesitation on the part of Florence, about accepting what was obviously yielded from considerations of expediency, not conceded as a right, caused a delay which Cecil made haste to improve,

by being the first to embark. Fred saw the smile of gratification on the faces of those who had espoused Cecil's side, and ground his teeth in rage, more bitter than ever against his opponent. He helped Florence in; and then his choler found vent in the play of his muscles, as he sent the light skiff spinning through the water.

As for Cecil, beneath his unruffled exterior a tornado of passion was raging. He was a man who never forgave an insult; and now was added the sting of coldness from the woman he loved. She had gone over to Fred's side, right or wrong, and with her eyes on the ground in cold contempt, drew aside her skirts to let Cecil pass.

In vain did May strive to be cheerful. Though he laughed and chatted with apparent ease, her woman's instinct told her that his thoughts were not upon her, nor on the conversation in hand.

A feeling of depression gradually stole over her; and when in the evening he was about to leave her at home, she threw herself upon his breast, in a sudden flood of tears.

"Why, May, what is the matter?" he asked, supporting her in his arms.

"Oh, Cecil!" she cried, in the quivering voice of a grieved child, "do you love me—really and truly? I sometimes feel that you do, and then—oh, I am so happy! But there will creep in such a chilling doubt, it seems as if my heart would freeze. I can't help it. I could die with wretchedness. Oh, tell me that you love me!"

"May! May!" he expostulated, soothing her with his hand. "You are not yourself. How can you doubt me? Have you not had an evidence of my love this very day? I never before in my life passed over an insult without resentment; but I remembered that he was your brother."

"Cecil, did you do it for my sake?" she cried, her face irradiated with ineffable happiness. And with her arms about his neck and her soft cheek against his, she went on: "Oh, my darling! you do love me—you do love me!"

Cecil Beaumont was not wholly bad; and as he felt this gentle creature nestle closer and closer in his arms, trembling in every limb with excess of happiness, and thought of the great wrong he was doing her, the hideousness of his duplicity arose before him, and something akin to remorse crept into his heart. If he could only get away from all the evil that surrounded him, and go with her to some uninhabited corner of the earth, he felt that he could reward her love with something like a return.

But then there appeared before him a scornful face, averted look and garments drawn disdainfully aside; and with a great leap of his heart, that almost found expression in a fierce cry, he set his teeth hard and returned to his purpose, all the more relentlessly because of this one moment of softening.

"Curse him! curse him!" he hissed, between his clenched teeth, when he was alone in the darkness of the street, "I'll sink him to the veriest depths, and then I'll have his blood!—ay, his blood! Money! what is money in the balance with a tortured heart? No! henceforth I live for revenge. If I ever had a scruple, on his account, this night I bury it. His arrogance has sealed his doom; his folly shall supply the means of its accomplishment."

CHAPTER VI.

THE EVE OF A CRISIS.

WITH the gathering shades of night, ghoulish clouds had begun to chase each other across the sky, and fitful gusts of wind, with the chill of the grave in them, scudded along the streets and sighed dismally among the tree-tops, while about the horizon hovered ominous lightnings, like the impotent menace of chained demons. Amid such a scene stood Cecil Beaumont, and bowing in his hands a face clammy with anguish-rung sweat, moaned:

"Oh, Florence! Florence! I could die for you, yet I shall blast your life by destroying him in whom your heart is bound up! Do you love him as I love you? If you do, then God help you!"

In the streets, with fellow-creatures thronging on every side, yet as much alone as if he were in a desert, Cecil Beaumont sought relief from the anguish that was consuming him.

While he was walking rapidly, a paper was thrust into his hand. He turned suddenly, but no one seemed near enough to have reached him. A second time Shadow Jim had baffled him, and now stood within four feet of him unsuspected.

At a gaslight in a deserted street he read the missive. It ran:

"Everything is in readiness. Be at your post."

With a quick-throbbing heart, Cecil walked rapidly to the bank. Now the die was to be cast. What would turn uppermost? Who could tell? Success, freedom, revenge, on one side; failure, infamy, a prison, and perhaps the gallows, on the other!

Cecil found Dawson, the janitor, already at the bank; for it was after ten o'clock. He had made his bed as usual by turning back the lounge, but sat reading the newspaper before retiring.

"Don't let me keep you up, when you get ready to go to bed, Dawson," said the cashier. "I've been on a lark, and those that dance must pay the fiddler, you know. It will be midnight before I can think of sleep."

He was soon busily engaged at his desk; and presently the old man retired, and his heavy snoring indicated the tranquillity of his slumber.

Cecil worked away with a will. In the morning he must have something to show for his two hours' work. When the clock struck twelve, he purposely closed with a slam the ledger in which he was writing. The sound awoke Dawson, as he intended it should, and he sat upright and rubbed his eyes.

"You're at work late, Mr. Beaumont," said the janitor, with a glance at the clock.

"Yes; but I am just through; I guess I won't go home to-night, but stay at the bank. By the way, won't you have a little wine with me? I'm feeling fagged out, and it won't do you any harm, either, at your age."

"Thankee, Mr. Beaumont," replied the janitor, his mouth beginning to water; for it was not the first time he had had a sip of wine with the cashier on similar occasions, and he knew that a rare treat awaited him. "As a man grows old, he do need a little something now and then to strengthen him."

Cecil passed into the next room, and soon reappeared with decanter and glasses. He filled a glass

for himself, and then pushed the decanter across the desk to Dawson.

They chatted awhile over their wine; and then Cecil passed into his own room, the janitor returned to his bed, and only his snoring broke the stillness.

Meanwhile, Fred Powell was again in the clutches of Billy Saunderson, the "decoy duck." Having already drunk too much wine at the picnic, he fell an easy prey to the designs of his pretended friend. Charley Brewster expostulated in vain.

"Come, Fred," he said, "it's only the part of a friend to tell you that you have drunk too much. You ought to go home. You know that I warned you the last time."

"Look-a-here, Mammy Brewster, take me under wing, too, do," sneered Billy Saunderson. "Now, unlike Fred here, I know I've been a naughty boy, and ought to be tucked in my little trundle-bed. Don't throw away your solicitude on this thankless beggar; but rake me to your maternal bosom."

Charley turned from him with an angry flush, but held his temper.

"Fred, will you come?" he asked. "You know it will be better for you."

"Confound it, Brewster," said Fred, who had not forgotten that it was Charley who offered Cecil his boat. "I supposed that it was generally accounted commendable in a man to be able to give due attention to his own affairs, without meddling with those of other people. I'm very grateful, and all that sort of thing, for your watchful care; but I confess myself at a loss to imagine who appointed you as my guardian and protector."

Snubbed a second time, Charley Brewster turned on his heel and walked off, without another word.

"Let the fool go!" he muttered, angrily. "I doubt whether I'm not the bigger fool for trying to reason with him."

Then he thought of May; and a pang of sympathy shot through his heart at the suffering she must endure over her brother's ruin.

"Disposed of once more," muttered Billy Saunderson, with a gleam of satisfaction, as Brewster turned away. "Now to business!"

He had no difficulty in still further plying Fred with liquor. But by half-past nine a feeling of remorse and shame came over Fred, and he determined to put an end to the dissipation of the evening.

"Pugh! Fred, you're not going!" said Billy, when he announced his purpose.

"Yes, I've had enough for to-night."

"But it ain't ten o'clock yet! Nonsense, man! we're in for a night of it. The Fourth of July don't come but once a year. Step up and take something."

"No more for me, if you please. You may stay as long as you like; but I am going to make a change of base."

"Oh, pshaw! Fred, this is stopping right in the middle."

But having declared his determination, Fred was not to be dissuaded, and began to walk toward the door. Billy accompanied him, and together they emerged on the street.

As they passed out the door they were jostled by others entering; and in that moment Billy's hand glided into Fred's pocket, and came out again, with a bunch of keys held between the fore and middle fingers. The keys were transferred to the "tail-pocket" of his own coat, and then Billy tied a knot of ribbon in his buttonhole, and walked as far as the corner with Fred. There he took leave of him, and returned to the hotel and went up to his room.

"I wonder if they are as sharp as they think they are?" he muttered, as he struck a light.

He suspected that in order to get possession of the keys, without his (Billy's) being able to swear that he had given them to him, Tiger Dick had employed a cunning thief to pick his pocket. But with this suspicion in his mind, he had watched every one that had come near him, in his walk to the corner and back; yet he had felt no hand in his pocket.

He now thrust his own hand in, expecting to draw forth the keys. What was his surprise to find, instead, a small round packet, wrapped in the foil from a package of tobacco? Upon being opened, it proved to contain ten ten-dollar bills.

"By the jumping geewhiskers! if that ain't the cutest dodge that was ever played on this sport!" he exclaimed, hardly able to credit his senses.

The truth was that he had not been robbed on the street, but after he returned to the hotel, and while he was passing through the crowded office, feeling secure from any attempt at thievery. Shadow Jim was by no means a bungler.

"Hurrah!" cried Billy, patting the money affectionately. "This will get me out of one of the confoundest scrapes that I ever got into. Hurrah! I'm on my feet again. Now, lay on, Macduff! Jump right up on my muscle! I'm ready for the whole kit and caboodle!"

In the exuberance of his joy, Billy resolved to make a night of it; and, secreting the money, returned to the saloon, after an absence of not more than fifteen minutes, where he again met Charley Brewster.

Meanwhile the knob of Tiger Dick's door turned, and without any previous warning, Shadow Jim stood in his presence.

"Your keys, boss," he said, laconically, tossing Fred Powell's keys on the table.

"Good! You were successful? Jim, you're a trump!"

He drew pen and paper before him, wrote a line, and said:

"That to Cecil Beaumont, without delay."

Shadow Jim took the paper, and without a word, left the room.

"Ha-ha! my fine bird," cried Tiger Dick, exultantly, rattling the keys. "These are the little jokers that answer half a dozen ends. First, they give us ready access to the treasure-house. Second, by seeming to implicate you, they stifle investigation. Third, they prove an 'open sesame,' should any of us run our head into a sling. Fourth, they set you and your precious grandpa by the ears, which may prove a hundred thousand or so in the pockets of Tiger Dick, my Lord Duke & Co. Fifth, they deprive you of the black-eyed Peri, who was never destined for such a loggerhead as you, and of whom more anon. Sixth, and best of all, by sinking you in infamy, they revenge the insult offered me in her presence!"

And at this last Tiger Dick ground his teeth and fetched his hand down on the table, with a force

that showed how bitterly the indignity put upon him yet rankled in his breast.

And all this time, Fred Powell, afraid to go home, lest this second lapse into intemperance should be detected, was sleeping off the effects of his dissipation in a boat-house on the river, all unconscious of the storm that loomed darkly above him, just about to burst.

CHAPTER VII.

THE BANK ROBBERY.

As Cecil Beaumont lay listening to the heavy breathing of Dawson, the janitor, a tumult of thoughts crowded his brain. This was the turning-point in the drama of wickedness in which he had involved himself. A few hours would prove the perfectness of all his plots.

In that moment he knew no relenting. He had cast his lot, and henceforward nothing could swerve him from the steady prosecution of his purpose.

"I am too deep in the mire to think now of retreat, even if I desired it, which I do not," he said. "All the high ground lies in advance. I must go forward. With twenty-five or thirty thousand dollars in my pocket, and Fred impassably separated from Florence, I can throw overboard May and her fortune, and try to win my heart's core—the apple of my eye! Oh! poverty and heaven with her! the wealth of the Orient and the tortures of hell without her! My life! my darling! I cannot—I will not give you up!"

The clock struck one. It broke in upon his meditations like a note of doom.

His bedroom door stood ajar, and he could hear the click!—click!—as the pendulum swung back and forth.

With bated breath, lips apart, and a clammy moisture on his brow, he fell to counting the seconds.

Thus the time wore on until the clock struck two. The tinkling sound died away in the silent room, and nothing was heard but the swaying of the pendulum and the heavy breathing of the sleeper. The suspense was becoming unendurable. Cecil Beaumont lay upon his bed, trembling from head to foot, and with the perspiration starting from every pore.

Presently he heard a sound, different from those he had been listening to. His heart gave a bound, and then stood still. He listened again. It was the gradual insertion of a key into a lock. It glided by the wards with a sound only perceptible to his strained senses. Then a door turned noiselessly on its hinges. A chilly breath of air reached him in his room. Muffled footsteps passed the threshold. The door was closed, and all was silent as the grave—all save the click!—click!—of the swaying pendulum and the heavy breathing of the sleeping janitor.

Cecil Beaumont could hear the blood course through the arteries of his neck, as it surged up into his brain, with a concussion like the fall of a heavy hammer.

Then long shadows fell through the crevice of the door, and traced their course across the walls of his darkened chamber—one!—two!—three! Then an interval of quiet, in which the pendulum seemed to cry out in warning—*awake!—awake!*—and the gurgling sound in the throat of the old sleeper sounded like the death-rattle.

Cecil Beaumont raised upon his elbow, with eyes fixed upon the crevice of the door, through which the light streamed faintly. He hushed his breath. It seemed as if the throbbing of his heart must be heard in the outer room.

Through the awful stillness came a sharp sound—not the click of the pendulum. Upon Cecil's sharpened senses it burst like the crack of a rifle, but he knew it was the set of the hammer of a pistol.

Then came a sound of awakening from the sleeper. The gurgle in his throat increased to a sound of strangulation that made Cecil shudder and his blood run cold. But the sleeper rallied, coughed, turned on his couch, and aroused himself with a stifled exclamation.

Next came a voice in a hoarse whisper:

"Silence, on your life!"

The old man lay still and said, in a subdued voice, somewhat shaken by apprehension:

"Gentlemen, what do you want with me?"

"Bind him!" came the whispered command. And then to the old man: "One motion of resistance, one sound to attract assistance, and your life pays the penalty!"

There was a slight creaking of the sofa-bedstead, as if the old man were turned on his face; then a coil of rope fell with a muffled sound to the floor.

"Now listen. And remember your life isn't worth a toss, if you try to spring any little game on us."

"You need not hold that pistol to my head; I will answer you."

"We will keep it there as a reminder. Is the key to the vault kept anywhere in the bank-office?"

"No, sir; not to my knowledge."

"Where is it?"

"Mr. Powell has one, sir."

"Anybody else?"

"The cashier, Mr. Beaumont."

"Where is he?"

"He lives—"

"Hist!" came a sudden warning. "What was that?"

"It sounded like some one breathing heavily, or snoring," said a strange voice.

"Harkee, old man," said he who appeared to be the principal, "does any one else sleep in this here shebang? Now keep a straight tongue!"

"Take it away, sir! I'll answer you. The cashier is sleeping in the next room."

"Hil men, gag this fellow. We've got all we want out of his clam-shell. Hold the little bulldog to his knowledge-box, Jimmy, while we escort in this dainty cashier. Gads! we're in luck!"

There were sounds as if his orders were being carried out, and then stealthy footsteps approached the door of the bedroom.

Despite his association in the plot, the acting was so real that Cecil felt his heart leap into his throat, as the door swung open, admitting a flood of light and three men in masks. The leader held a cocked pistol in his hand; the second carried a coil of rope, and the third a gag.

Cecil lay as if asleep, until the masked intruder placed a heavy hand on his shoulder. Then he

started up with a suppressed cry, in which all was not feigned, to such a light had his feelings been wrought by this diabolical acting.

"Not a sound, or you are a dead man!" commanded his assailant, with the pistol at his head.

"I see that I am in your power, and know the folly of offering resistance. Take away your weapon," said Cecil, in a voice whose tremulousness was unassumed.

"You have very sensible views," replied the masked ruffian; "but, if you please, we will put it out of your power to resist. Bind his left arm securely, men. And, as we have no use for his tongue, put a stopper on it. You see, if I do all the talking, you will have so much better opportunity to act."

His orders being executed, he went on:

"Now, sir, we'll give you a chance to get into your pantaloons, if you are particular on that score. But none of your tricks, or I'll let daylight through you in the drop of an eyelash!"

Cecil availed himself of the privilege, and was then led out into the counting-room. He found Dawson lying on his couch, bound and gagged like himself. The janitor looked the sympathy he could not speak.

The leader now drew a bowie-knife from his belt, and holding it so that the point just touched the back of Cecil's neck, said:

"Now, Mr. Cashier, the firm, which I have the honor to represent, has concluded to withdraw its deposits from this bank. Just open that door, if you please."

As there was no help for it, Cecil produced the key, inserted it into the slit of the lock, gave it a half-turn, and one of the burglars shot back the bolts and swung the door open.

"That's as easy as rolling off a log," laughed the leader. "If we always had so obliging a janitor, we could dispense altogether with them tools."

Turning to one of his companions, he said:

"Just keep an eye on that snoozer, Jimmy, while we take a peep into the sanctum sanctorum."

At this point, the call of a night-bird sounded clear on the air.

With a swift motion, the leader thrust Cecil into the vault.

"File in there!" cried the chief to his subordinates, "and run a knife into that cashier, if he utters a chirp."

As they leaped in and grasped Cecil one on either side, the chief shut the vault door, and then turned to the terrified janitor.

"Move an eyewinker, and you are a dead man!" he said, sternly.

He drew a coverlet over the prostrate man, and then secreted himself under the counter, keeping the janitor covered with his pistol.

Dawson supposed that the burglars had received warning that they were in danger of detection; but, far from calling for help, he lay scarcely daring to breathe. He had seen the two knives held in terrifying proximity to Cecil's heart, and now saw the flashing barrel that kept its frowning muzzle pointed toward himself.

The lower blinds being closed, the burglars would have been invisible to any one passing in the street; but they had secreted themselves in order that suspicion might not be awakened by any chance shadow thrown upon the walls.

After the lapse of about ten minutes a different cry was heard, and the burglar emerged fearlessly from beneath the counter.

"Whew!" exclaimed one of the ruffians, drawing a long breath, when they were released from the vault. "Don't ever shove this chicken into such an oven as that again. I began to think the old boy had got my carcass, sure."

"You'll be in a hotter place than that some of these fine days," laughed the chief. "But now for business. Just handle them little silver knobs, Mr. Cashier—lively!"

With a knife held playfully at his throat, Cecil went through the combination, and the burglars threw open the safe. With exclamations of satisfaction, they rummaged the safe, appropriating all the paper money and the small supply of coin it contained.

Cecil was then bound securely, and thrown upon the bed beside the janitor; and taking up their bag of cracksman's tools, for which there had been no use, the burglars withdrew.

"Keep up heart, my trusted bantams," said the chief, playfully. "In the morning you may tell your people that you have had visitors during the night."

Then he went out, closing the door after him, and turning a key.

The janitor stretched his neck around to look his perplexity at Cecil. Where did the burglars get a key?—Dawson would have asked, had he had the use of his tongue. Cecil only returned his blank gaze.

The scene in the bank had a sequel which had not been counted on. The perpetrators of the robbery had proceeded several blocks undisturbed, when, suddenly, they heard the measured footfall of a policeman ahead of them.

"Hunt your holes!" commanded the leader; and the whole crew dashed into an alleyway. "This won't do," he went on. "We must scatter or the cops will bag the whole lot of us."

Acting upon his suggestion, two of the ruffians took one direction, and he and the fourth took another, intending to further separate as soon as opportunity offered.

As they were proceeding through to the other street, a dog suddenly leaped out upon them, raising an uproar with his barking. The burglars started forward on a run, anxious to get clear of a vicinity where detection was so imminent.

As they emerged from the alley, the one in advance rushed headlong into the arms of a policeman, who was coming to investigate the cause of the noise, and both went to the ground.

"Stick a knife into him, Jimmy," cried the captured burglar.

But the policeman was strong and active, and kept up such a lively motion that the ruffian was at a loss where to strike, so as not to injure his pal. All the while he was calling loudly for assistance.

Soon there was a rush of feet and a whirl of rattles, and, seeing himself in danger of apprehension, Jimmy abandoned his luckless chief and plunged into the alley. Here he was again attacked by the

dog; but as the act could not now further jeopard his safety, and as the brute, if left, might be employed by the police to track him, he shot him, and sped on through the darkness.

Emerging on another street, he ran up a stairway, fearing to appear in the street, where he might meet an officer at any turn. Up to the fourth story and out upon the roof, carefully replacing the scuttle; from roof to roof and down through another building into a cross street he passed, and gliding from doorway to doorway like a shadow, he eluded his pursuers.

Meanwhile, the plucky policeman clung to his captive until assistance came. Then he was secured and his wrists ornamented with the steel bracelets. His mask had been torn off in the struggle; and a bull's-eye turned upon him revealed the smiling countenance of Tiger Dick.

"Well, gents," he said, coolly, "you've got me; I don't ask to be handled like a baby; but I ain't the devil, either; so a reasonable amount of tying up and holding onto will keep me from running away. If you know of any nice boarding place in a quiet neighborhood, suppose we seek it and get in out of the night air."

The policemen knew the Tiger, and laughed at his sally. One of them said:

"Ain't this a little out of your line, Richard?"

"Ain't what out of my line?"

"Why, this masquerading, you know, at such unreasonable hours," replied the officer, with a grin.

"What's to prevent a citizen of this here Commonwealth from taking an airing whenever he pleases? And if he has a mind to protect his phiz from these raw winds, who's to hinder, I'd like to know?"

The Tiger pushed his tongue into his cheek, canted his head on one side, and favored his auditors with a decided wink.

His playfulness put them in a good humor. Even his first captor laughed as he rubbed his head where it had sustained too intimate relations with the pavement.

"I say, Bewick," said Tiger Dick, addressing one of the policemen, as they walked along, "if, when you are off duty in the morning, you will take the trouble to tell Jimmy Duff the number of my room and ask him to drop around, the first thing, he'll pay you the five dollars that I'll owe you. I wouldn't ask him to call upon me, only I feel as if I'd keep the house for a few days."

Bewick laughingly promised compliance, and one of the other officers said:

"Speaking of Jimmies, wasn't that 'The Shady' that gave us the slip?"

"He called him Jimmy, and requested him to tuck his knife under my ribs," said the policeman who had effected the capture.

"All's fair in love and war," laughed the Tiger. "Not that I loved you less, but that I hated your company more."

"Laven, McCabe and Doolan, suppose you go and lay for Shadow Jim," said the officer who appeared to be in command.

"You may lay as much as you please; but if you hatch out that chick, just let me know," said the Tiger, with a chuckle.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE TIGER UNDISMAYED.

TIGER DICK sat in his cell, with a look in which was a curious blending of satisfaction and vexation.

"It's deuced hard luck to be cooped up in this handbox," he said, with a half-frown, glancing around the narrow confines of the room. "Well, they can't bring anything against me but resisting arrest, if I can only stop the mouth of Freddy's pa. Gads! it was lucky I put the keys into the sachel along with the greenbacks, or they would have found them when they searched me. Shadow Jim must have grabbed up the sachel, when he let out. He's a trump, he is. He saw there was no use of sticking to me any longer—he'd only get bagged along with me, if he did—and so he made off with the plunder, which the same was the only evidence of our indebtedness to Messrs. Carrington & Powell. If I hadn't intrusted the yellow boys"—Dick meant the coin—"to McFarland, we would have been in a box. He would have had to leave one or the other, which would have been equally bad. By the way, I suppose Mac is just rogue enough to run away with the skads, if he didn't know that I'd hunt him through purgatory and back but I'd put a sky-light into his carcass for it."

"Well, well! one day we're up and the next we're down. If the valiant Duff will only put in an appearance, we'll see what can be done toward effecting my release from this snug little seven-by-nine."

Jimmy Duff was Tiger Dick's partner. His "end of the shop" was the "whisky slingin'" while the Tiger "manipulated the pasteboards." He was a man with bristling black hair and bristling black beard. When he frowned, his beetling black brows bristled; and when he compressed his lips, the hairs of his short-cropped mustache rose successively, like the quills of an angry hedgehog. The corporeal man had imbibed, or in some way acquired, the symmetrical proportions of his whisky-barrels; and the musical gurgle of the "crathur" lingered in his voice.

"Arrah! Dick, me jewel, an' f'what are ye doin' he-ur, in this baste av a hole?" was the salutation, when ushered by the warden into the presence of the Tiger.

"Sit down, Jimmy," said Tiger Dick, making room on the edge of his bed. "It isn't a very long story; but then a man of your proportions isn't expected to stand long on his feet."

"Whisht! me b'y," said Duff, letting himself down upon the bed and mysteriously drawing a flask from his pocket. "It's meself that's brought ye a toothful av potheen, sure, to liven ye up a bit. Kape a stout hairt, an' we'll jerk ye out o' this loike droppin' a hot pratie. Meself's the b'y that 'ud loike to knock the face off the murderin' spalpeens that clapped hands on you last night, bad cess to them, so I would!"

Tiger Dick drank off the liquor, and smacking his lips, said:

"Jimmy, I'll remember you on the judgment-day, if I see it going hard with you, and I have a drop of consolation in my canteen. But now to business. Have you seen anything of Shadow Jim?"

"Nather hide nor hair of 'im, the gossoon."

"Well, keep your eyes peeled and get some keys that he has, if you can. He is lying low, because the cops that nabbed me got their peepers on him, too. Stow him away somewhere, if he comes to you; and tell McFarland and O'Toole to keep shady until we find out whether they are suspected or not."

"Meself's yer mutton for that job, Dick, darlint!" said Duff, with enthusiasm.

"And, Jimmy, there's another bit of business that I want you to do for me."

"Anything in the worruld, Dick, alanna."

"You know where Powell, the banker, hangs out?"

"Faith, an' I do that same."

"Well, some gents, wanting their deposits last night, drew them out, without waiting for the teller."

"The murderin' divils!" exclaimed Duff, with a wink that buried his sharp little eye beneath his bristling black brow and bristling black beard.

"However, the cashier was present."

"Bad luck to him, for a thafe o' the worruld!"

"And they persuaded him to unlock the strong-box and hand over the money; without stopping to count it, however, as they were somewhat pressed for time."

"Och, acushla machree! was there iver such a b'y? Dick, avourneen, why did ye niver go to Congress? Sure, there's not your equal on binch or bar."

"Well, old pard, said Tiger Dick, passing over the compliment of the other, "I want you to go to that bank, without delay, as it is now nearly banking hours."

"Sure, Dick, darlint," interrupted Duff, "I would have come to you by the break o' morn, but I'm just from a bit of a wake at Billy Mavourney's the night, and word didn't reach me till this half an hour gone."

"Well, go to the bank, and you will doubtless find them in hot water by this time. But tell Mr. Powell, for the sake of his family pride and for the honor of his name, not to spring his trap until he finds what kind of game he has in it. Mind you, for the sake of his family pride and for the honor of his name. If he asks what that means, tell him that you know nothing about it; but that you are sent by Tiger Dick, who told you to advise him to keep the whole matter dark, until he has asked his cashier and janitor if they didn't hear a key turn in the lock after the burglars went out."

"A key, is it?" asked Duff, with awakened curiosity, remembering that he was to get some keys from Shadow Jim.

"Never mind anybody else's hand, Duff; but play your own game," said the Tiger, nipping his curiosity in the bud.

"Niver fear o' me, Dick. Is that all?"

"That's all. Only try to get to the bank before the thing is noised abroad."

Meanwhile the messenger-boy had come to the bank with the morning mail. At the door he met another clerk, and together they entered the bank. What was their surprise at seeing the cashier and janitor lying bound and gagged on the bed of the latter.

"Run for a doctor, Tommy," cried the elder clerk, fearing that the men might be otherwise injured. Then he set about cutting the cords that bound them, with his knife.

The messenger-boy ran to the door, and seeing a doctor riding by, called to him excitedly.

"What is the matter, my little fellow?" asked the physician, driving up to the curbstone, and leaping out.

"Oh, sir! Mr. Beaumont and Dawson are tied up on Dawson's bed, and I don't know what else is the matter with them."

The boy's excited words attracted several passers-by, and they, with the doctor, hurried into the bank.

Cecil and Dawson were somewhat stiff and sore from the ligatures and gags, but otherwise uninjured. The cashier briefly stated what had occurred.

"And, by Jove, sirs!" cried Dawson, in addition, "the scamps let themselves out with a key! How the devil did they get in?—that's what I'd like to know."

Examination was made, and doors and windows gave no appearance of having been tampered with. "False keys," was the verdict volunteered by one of the spectators.

At this point a carriage drove up and Mr. Powell and May entered.

"What is the matter, Mr. Beaumont?" asked the banker, surprised at the unusual appearance of things.

"Mr. Powell, I am sorry to have to announce that the bank has been the scene of a very daring robbery."

Cecil then told Mr. Powell in a few words what had happened.

"Well, this is no time for inaction," said the banker, briskly. "Has anything been done to notify the proper authorities?"

"It is not five minutes since myself and Dawson were released from our uncomfortable position."

"Dawson, clear the bank and secure the door. Mr. Farrell, oblige me by taking the carriage and going for Mr. Carrington. Mr. Worth, I guess I shall have to depend upon you to fetch the chief of police and his most experienced detective. Mr. Beaumont, if you will step into my private room, we will go over this thing a little more in detail; then we will look into our losses."

Mr. Powell gave his directions in a quiet, yet rapid voice, and stepped to his desk.

"Cecil are you hurt?" May found time to ask, with an anxious look.

"Not at all," he replied, pressing her hand reassuringly.

Mr. Powell made himself master of all the facts, listening to the stories of both Cecil and Dawson. Subsequent investigation proved that the bank had suffered to the amount of something over sixty thousand dollars. A placard was made out, announcing the fact of the robbery, and stating, over the signature of the president and cashier, that the bank would be able to resume business in a few days.

Dawson took this to post it on the door. He was accosted by a man with bristling black hair and bristling black beard, who stepped out of the crowd, and regarded him with sharp black eyes that gleamed shrewdly from beneath bristling black

brows, while he was addressing him in a voice that had the gurgle of "potheen" in it.

"Faith, an' I'd loike to see Mr. Powell, the banker, if he is widin'."

"Can't see anybody just now. He's busy," said Dawson, shortly.

Judging from the appearance of the applicant, he supposed him a creditor to the amount of two shillings and sixpence, more or less, anxious to secure his deposit.

"But it's pertic'lar," persisted the man. "Faith, it's more for his binist than me own that I'm seeking him."

"Can't see anybody," insisted the janitor.

"Arrah, thin!" exclaimed the man, somewhat impatiently, "will ye take me caired to him?"

"Yes, I'll take your card; but it won't do no good."

The man took a greasy card from his pocket, wrote a few words on it in lead pencil, and handed it to the janitor.

"Begorra, he'll be only too glad to see me," he said, confidently.

Dawson took the card disdainfully, and carried it to Mr. Powell.

"This is sent you, sir, by a hard-looking customer that insists on seeing you, and I can't get rid of him no way."

The banker glanced at the card, and read:

"James Duff—who can throw some light on the affair of last night."

"What sort of a person is he, Dawson?" asked the banker.

"A clodhopper, sir, that looks as if he were not long out of jail," answered Dawson, in great disgust.

The banker smiled at the description, thought a moment, and then said:

"Fetch him in, anyway."

Jimmy Duff was ushered in, himself radiant, the janitor crestfallen.

"Have a chair, Mr. Duff," said the banker, eying him curiously. "Well, sir, what can you tell us of last night's business?"

"Perhaps I might see you alone, now?" said Mr. Duff, in an insinuating tone, glancing at May and Cecil, who were the only remaining occupants of the room.

"It is only my daughter and cashier, sir. Pray proceed without reserve."

"But, yer honor, my business concerns jist yerself alone, an' it's pertic'lar loike."

"You need have no hesitancy about speaking in the presence of these people. My cashier is, of course, in my confidence, and the lady, being my daughter, need not interfere with any communication you wish to make."

May withdrew to a window. Cecil sat expectant and anxious, though he strove to prevent his face from betraying the fact.

Duff scratched his head, at a loss how to make the banker appreciate the situation without stating the case before the cashier. Presently he had an idea—he would throw out a hint.

"You must know, sir, I'm come from Tiger Dick. He would have called upon you in person, d'ye mind, but he's confined to the house. The fact is, in plain English, the cops has taken him to board," said Mr. Duff, with a grin. "Tha-ur," he added, mentally, "he'll twig that, and send this spalpeen of a cashier off on his ear."

But Mr. Powell evidently did not understand Mr. Duff's "plain English," for he turned to Cecil in perplexity. The cashier had changed color at Duff's announcement; but he rallied, and summoning a smile to his face, said:

"I think he means that the man is confined in jail."

"That's it, me jewel," assented Mr. Duff. "Sure he's in dirty wather up to his eyes intirely."

"And who is this Tiger Dick?" asked the banker.

"Faith, he's my pardner, yer honor. We kape a little shebang on River street, just beyant the boat landing, wha-ur we dale out the most iligant liquors that's dhrank in the Mississippi valley. More than that, we give the b'ys amusement playing wid the tiger. I sling the whisky, d'ye mind, while Tiger Dick manipulates the pasteboards."

Mr. Powell turned to Cecil with a sudden look of inquiry. Cecil understood him and silently bowed. A look of pain and a flush passed over the banker's face.

"Well, sir, proceed. What of this Tiger Dick?" he asked, quietly.

Duff looked surprised and uneasy. The banker did not yet see the drift of his words.

"He was arrested last night, yer honor," he said, pointedly.

"Ah! Go on," said Mr. Powell, with awakening interest.

"And he sinds a missage, sir, to you, that concerns only yerself."

"Very well; deliver it," said the banker, a little impatiently.

Jimmy Duff gave up in despair. He slid forward on his chair, with his hands on his knees. His hair bristled, and his black eyes snapped. He compressed his lips, until each particular hair of his mustache seemed endowed with individual erectile power, and his voice gurgled defiance, as he said:

"Faith, yer honor, he said that I was to tell yez, fur the sake o' y'ur family pride and fur the honor o' y'ur name, kape this whole affa-ur daik, until yez ax yer cashier and janitor did they he-ur a key turn in the lock, when the burglarians went out o' the do-ur? An' now now ye have it!"

"Why, the man must be crazy!" cried Mr. Powell, in bewilderment. "Mr. Beaumont, what do you make out of this rignarole?"

"Sir, I am as much at a loss as yourself," replied the cashier.

"Thin's his worruds," persisted Duff. "As ye valley yer family pride and the honor o' yer name, don't spring yer thrap until yez see what koin'd o' game ye're going to catch."

"Father, what does he mean?" whispered May, coming to the back of her father's chair, and laying her trembling hand on his shoulder. "He keeps repeating that—the honor of your name and 'your family pride.' What can he mean?"

"Will you repeat the message just as it was sent?" asked the banker, now pale, now red.

"Fur the sake o' yer family pride, and fur the

honor o' yer name, don't spring yer thrap until yez see what koin'd o' game ye're going to catch. Kape this whole affa-ur daik, until yez ax yer cashier and janitor did they he-ur a key turn in the lock, when the burglarians went out o' the do-ur," repeated Duff, slowly and distinctly.

"Mr. Beaumont, oblige me by calling Dawson."

The banker now spoke in a strangely-constrained tone of voice. On the appearance of the janitor, he said:

"Dawson, repeat your story, after the burglars secured the money."

"Why, sir, all there was to it is, that they finished binding Mr. Beaumont, and threw him onto the bed, and went off."

"Through the door?"

"Yes, sir; and turned the key after them. Wherever they got it from I don't know."

"Put your latch-key on the table, please."

Dawson complied in bewilderment, glancing suspiciously at Jimmy Duff, whose mustache displayed unusual activity, and whose eyes twinkled with malicious triumph.

Suddenly Mr. Powell bethought him that there was no use in letting the enemy see that the attack was weakened by the first shot.

"Mr. Duff," he said, referring to the card, "your address is—"

"149 River street."

"And the prisoner—"

"Beloike will remain so, yer honor, for a few days, at last, and can be found at the jail, cell twenty seven, second flo-ur."

"Thank you. Was there any thing more?"

"Not-thing mo-ur, yer honor," said Duff, rising. And with an awkward bow, in which every hair on his bristling face and head participated on its own account, he withdrew.

"Dawson, send all the clerks in here," said the banker.

They filed in, and each, at Mr. Powell's direction, left his latch-key on the desk. Cecil Beaumont added his to the rest.

"Gentlemen," said Mr. Powell to his bewildered subordinates, "you will oblige me by not communicating outside what has taken place since you entered the bank."

He bowed to intimate their dismissal, and they withdrew.

"There are still Messrs. Farrell and Worth," said the banker, meditatively. He did not mention Fred. Was the avoidance of his name intentional?

CHAPTER IX.

ANOTHER VIEW OF THE CASE.

"Mr. BEAUMONT," said the banker, with a far-away look in his eyes, "set the clerks to work straightening up matters, and tabulate our condition as soon as possible. Of course, the regular routine of business will go forward without interruption, except only passing money over the counter."

Cecil went out to get the force to work. Mr. Powell let his head fall upon his arms and gave himself up to painful meditation. May wept silently apart. The return of the carriage aroused the banker, and a moment afterward his father-in-law entered.

"Well, John, what is the trouble?" he asked, seating himself.

Mr. Powell stated the facts of the robbery.

"And our losses?"

"Are in the neighborhood of sixty thousand."

"Hum! What has been done about it?"

"I have placarded our misfortune, with the assurance of resumption of business in a few days; set Mr. Beaumont to work to ascertain our exact condition, and sent for the chief of police."

"The most important step of the three," replied Mr. Carrington, in a business-like tone. "Here he is now."

The door opened, giving admittance to the aldermanic chief of police and a wiry little detective. Mr. Carrington drew up a chair, nodding to the guardian of the city, ready for business. Mr. Powell changed color, and greeted them in unmistakable embarrassment.

"My daughter," he said, in an undertone, to May, "this is no place for you. Return home, and if you find Frederick, send him to me immediately."

Pale with anxiety and vague terror, May grasped her father's hand and gazed into his face beseechingly. He pressed her hand lovingly and said:

"Go, my child, and may God bless you."

May withdrew, and her father turned to the officers of the law, whom his own orders had summoned. It was with downcast eyes and a hesitation that called a look of surprise to every face in the room.

"Well, Mr. Powell, you sent for me?" said the chief of police.

"I did, sir," replied the banker, in a constrained voice; "but circumstances have intervened which have decided me to consult with Mr. Carrington, before laying the matter before you."

"Indeed, sir!" said the chief of police, in surprise.

"Ah!" said the detective, under his breath, and the pupils of his eyes contracted with shrewd speculation. He was adding Mr. Powell's evident embarrassment to his words, and trying to deduce a rational conclusion.

"What do you say?" said Mr. Carrington, in amazement. "What has intervened to prevent our putting the matter immediately into the hands of the proper authorities?"

Directness was Mr. Carrington's characteristic, and he could conceive of no possible reason for delay.

"I will explain it to you, if these gentlemen will excuse us. I am sorry to have put you to this trouble, gentlemen—"

"Don't mention it, sir," said the chief of police, rising. "We are at your service whenever you see fit to send us word."

Mr. Powell seemed greatly relieved, and murmured some broken apology.

"I confess myself completely mystified; but I presume your reasons are sufficient," said Mr. Carrington, throwing himself back into his chair and rubbing his head, like a man who submitted to the discussion of a point to which there was but one side.

"Good-morning, gentlemen—good-morning," he added, as if to say—"You see, I have no part in this shilly-shally."

The officers bowed themselves out, and Mr. Powell turned toward his father-in-law.

"Well, John," said the old gentleman, a little impatiently, "what kind of a move is this?"

Mr. Powell wiped his forehead with his handkerchief. He sat down with his hands in his lap and with bowed head, looking ten years older since he entered the bank.

"I must tell you that since sending for you and the police, I have received a visitor."

"Well?" seeing that the banker paused.

Mr. Powell moistened his lips with his tongue and went on.

"He was sent to me by a ruffian who is now in jail—captured last night."

"Have you any reason to believe that he was connected with the robbery?" asked Mr. Carrington, with eagerness.

"I believe that he was the leading spirit."

"No! Was there any money found on him?"

"I know nothing of the particulars of his arrest. My suspicion is only an inference based upon a message he sent me."

"A message? Why, in the name of wonder, should he send you a message?"

Mr. Powell covered his face with his hands and groaned in anguish of spirit.

"Why, what is the matter?" cried Mr. Carrington, in amazement and dismay.

"It was a warning," said Mr. Powell, in a broken voice. "His words were: 'For the sake of your family pride and for the honor of your name, do not spring your trap until you find what sort of game you are going to catch. Ask your cashier and janitor if they did not hear a key turn in the lock after the burglars went out.'"

"And you have asked your cashier and janitor?" asked Mr. Carrington, coldly.

"Yes; and they *did* hear a key turn in the lock."

"John," and there was a ring of vexation in the old man's voice, "I wouldn't have believed that you could be taken in by such a shallow imposition as this."

"I fear it may cover a most heartrending fact for me."

"Pish! It is buncombe—chaff! What does it mean? Just nothing."

"But the motive? What is to be gained by sending such a message?"

"Gained! Time!—time for his blackleg accomplices to make off with the spoil. Precious time, that we have been wasting in hunting mere's nests."

"Is that your interpretation of it?" asked Mr. Powell, looking up with wonder and inexpressible relief depicted on his countenance.

"Certainly. What else? What is the sense of your Delphic oracle? It reads like a passage out of Sixteen-string Jack. It is nonsense. What has your 'family pride' or the 'honor of your name' to do with keys? Are you a locksmith?"

"What a dolt I have proved myself!" exclaimed Mr. Powell, rallying as if a load had fallen from his shoulders.

"That's a very healthy state of mind to be in. We all come to it sooner or later, I believe," said Mr. Carrington, with the air of a philosopher.

Then thumping his cane on the floor, and arising and walking across the room with one hand in his pocket, he added:

"Now, if you're ready, recall your dinner-loving chief of police and his little ferret of a detective. I'm afraid, when they come to spring the trap, they will find no game at all."

"I will lose no more time," asserted Mr. Powell, rising now as business-like as his partner.

He did not reflect that he had interpreted Tiger Dick's words in the light of knowledge of which Mr. Carrington was not in possession, and that for want of it the latter could not appreciate the case in all its bearings; and in his ignorance was likely to jump at a wrong conclusion. His heart, not his reason, shudderingly threw off the dark suspicion that had obtruded itself on his mind; and forcing himself to believe, because he wished to believe and because he had not the courage to face a truth of such horrible aspect, he took the first avenue of escape, which he felt but would not acknowledge to himself, to be a self-delusion. This struggle manifested itself in resentment to Tiger Dick; and he arose with a look of angry determination that would have made the Tiger tremble, could he have seen it.

As the banker was about to pass into the outer office, he was met in the doorway by the cashier.

"Mr. Beaumont," he said, "please send for the officers again. It is no fool's errand we have for them this time, I think."

CHAPTER X.

THE CROWNING MOVE.

WHEN Cecil Beaumont left the private room of the banker, he found the clerks perched up on desks, tables and high stools, discussing the all-absorbing topic. The reception of the bristling Duff and his smiling exit, followed by the demand for their latch-keys, caused a feeling of uneasiness, as indicating (viewed in connection with Dawson's story of the turning of a key in the lock) that suspicion in some way rested upon one of their number. But the cashier broke in upon their speculations.

"Come, gentlemen," he said, "this unfortunate affair need not interfere with our regular office-work. Mr. Carlisle"—to the bookkeeper—"you will please figure up our exact condition, and Mr. Farrell"—the teller—"will assist you when he returns."

Cecil then went to his desk, and began looking over the mail.

Mr. Carrington and the teller soon entered, the former passing immediately into the banker's private room. Mr. Farrell, at the request of the cashier, left his latch-key on the latter's desk. Every eye saw it, and every breast drew a breath of relief. The interest and suspense now centered upon Mr. Worth.

He soon entered with the officers of the law, and, like the rest, gave up his key. Then every one returned to work with a feeling of security. Fred Powell had not appeared; but no one thought of him in that connection.

The departure of May Powell had little interest in it for any one but Charley Brewster, who leaped down from his high stool and accompanied her to the carriage. His keen eyes soon detected through her veil that she had been weeping, and a look of sympathy came into his eyes, that touched the young girl's heart. As he assisted her into the carriage, she

gave his hand a little, grateful squeeze, that went straight to his heart in a warm glow.

"I wonder why she was weeping?" he mused, as he re-entered the bank. "It can't be the money. They will not feel that."

And he sat down to his desk with a puzzled expression in his eyes.

The chief of police and his satellite almost immediately followed May; but nothing could be gathered from their impassible faces, though every one wondered at their brief stay.

Suddenly a red flush passed over the cashier's face, and went away, leaving him pale. He arose with a piece of paper in his hand, and passed into his bedchamber.

Once hid from others' eyes, Cecil Beaumont laid the draft on the marble-top dressing-table, and gazed at it intently.

"Step the third!" he said, in a deliberate tone. "First, his confidence is shaken by intemperance and gambling. Next he is made to suspect his complicity in robbery. A big stride, certainly; but gamblers get desperate, and he would not be the first son who has betrayed his father, to procure the means to continue in his course of dissipation. And then, why did he demand the latch-keys and dismiss the police? It can bear but one interpretation."

"Well, this is a most excellent preparation for this next stroke. But seemingly-perfect plans have sometimes fallen through at the very moment of success. I must be prepared. I would much rather Harold Carrington were not present. But delay is hazardous. I must strike while the iron is hot."

He drew a pistol from his pocket, and examined its loading with a hand that trembled slightly.

"I am playing for high stakes," he muttered. "I will win all, or lose all!"

Then tossing off two or three glasses of wine in succession, he took the draft and went to the banker's private room.

Cecil Beaumont started, and the blood rushed back on his heart, as Mr. Powell met him in the doorway, and said:

"Mr. Beaumont, please send for the officers again. It is no fool's errand we have for them this time, I think."

He spoke in a brisk, business-like tone, and the shadow of pain had left his brow.

"What kind of a turn of affairs is this?" asked Cecil of himself. "He cannot mean to give up his son."

Then, glancing at Mr. Carrington, and noting his undisturbed appearance, he concluded that the elder gentleman had in some way freed the mind of the other of his apprehensions.

Cecil Beaumont saw the whole fabric of his machinations tottering about his ears. It was a supreme moment; but he rose with the emergency. Fighting off the chill of despair that seized him, he summoned to his face a look of sympathetic grief, and kept on into the room, closing the door after him.

Mr. Powell stepped back with a look of surprise at the manner of his cashier, and a glance at the draft he held in his hand. Somehow, the latter sent a chill to his heart.

"Wait a moment, Mr. Powell," said Cecil. "I have just come across a matter which I believe should be submitted to you before any further steps are taken."

"What! more delays?" demanded Mr. Carrington, with a frown, thumping his cane impatiently on the floor.

"It seems to me unavoidable, sir," replied Cecil, deferentially.

Then, turning to Mr. Powell, he went on, with a great show of embarrassment:

"It is a very delicate matter, Mr. Powell. If you would allow me to first communicate with you alone—"

He hesitated, and looked at the banker compassionately.

"No," said Mr. Powell, sinking into a chair from very weakness, the old stoop coming into his shoulders, and the old tremulousness to his frame. "I have nothing apart from Mr. Carrington. Make known what you wish to state."

"It was to save you pain, sir," replied Cecil, gently, still hesitating.

"Another bugaboo," cried Mr. Carrington, testily. He hated bother and circumlocution. "One would think we were debating the propriety of negotiating a loan, instead of trying to set in motion the machinery necessary to recover what has been forcibly taken from us."

"State your case, Mr. Beaumont, and be as brief as possible," said Mr. Powell, in a sinking tone.

Mr. Beaumont began by saying:

"Here are the keys of Farrel and Worth."

And he laid them on the desk with the rest.

"Confound the keys!" muttered Mr. Carrington, with his chin resting on his hands, while they were clasped over the head of his cane.

But as they clinked among the rest, the sound fell upon Mr. Powell's heart like a knell.

"Mr. Powell," began the cashier, "being in your confidence as much as I have been, and having seen and heard all that has transpired here within the last twenty-four hours, my thoughts are unavoidably urged in one direction. I do not offer what I am about to lay before you as confirmation of the painful impressions I have received—impressions which, if true, only yourself can deprecate more than I do—but they are associated through their connection with the same person, and may throw light one upon the other."

This introduction only nettled Mr. Carrington.

"Mr. Beaumont," he said, "can you give us in a few words, the bearing of all this?"

But every sentence fell upon Mr. Powell like the rendering of judgment, and he sat mute.

"I will give you the facts, sir, without further remark," replied the cashier. "Three weeks ago, when about to destroy some old papers, I found these bits of half-burnt paper in the stove."

He spread before them two pieces of paper, which had been almost wholly destroyed by fire, what was left being badly scorched.

"Your signature, John?" said Mr. Carrington; and then looking closer: "Why, I believe they are imitations."

Mr. Powell gazed upon the scared scraps of paper with a laboring of the chest, and tears that welled into his eyes and confused the lines of writing.

"They are not genuine," he said, in a low tone.

"At first," continued Cecil, "I thought nothing about them; but then it occurred to me that they might be the work of one of the clerks, done in a moment of thoughtlessness, and not with evil purpose. I determined to preserve them, find out who had written them, and warn him of the danger of a practice which, however innocent in itself, might give rise to ugly suspicions, should a forgery come to light in which he might be implicated. With this purpose, I put them in my desk, and, in the press of other matters, forgot all about them."

"Well, sir, the sequel," said Mr. Carrington. "What makes these bits of paper and the imitated signatures of particular interest at this time, and by what association do they impede the immediate lodgment of the case of burglary with the proper authorities?"

"Mr. Powell, will you look at this draft?" asked the cashier, placing it before him on the desk.

The banker took up the draft with a trembling hand, and tried to examine the signature. It was signed "John Powell, President," but what with the unsteadiness of the paper, and the dazzling lymph through which he saw it, he could make nothing of the writing. He handed it to his partner, without comment.

Mr. Carrington took the draft and looked at the signature. Gradually a frown indented his brows.

"This is a forgery, Mr. Beaumont, and apparently done by the same person who imitated the signature on the burnt paper. It seems that we have a traitor in our very camp. But what is the connection between this domestic villainy and the outside foe. You intimated as much."

Mr. Powell covered his face with his hands and remained silent.

"Mr. Carrington," said Cecil, slowly, "might not a forger enter into collusion with a burglar, for the same end—money?"

"Possibly."

"It pains me to proceed; but I feel it my duty to push this matter to the end. On the desk before you are a lot of keys, collected because of word sent by a man now in prison, captured last night, who as good as announces himself concerned in the robbery. His words were: 'Do not spring your trap, until you find what sort of game you are going to catch. First ask your cashier and janitor if they did not hear a key turn in the lock after the burglars went out.'"

"But, sir," interrupted the elder gentleman, "those words are mere buncombe, sent in order to gain time for his accomplices to secure hiding for the spoil. And they are effecting their purpose in a most eminent degree!" he continued, chafing at the delay.

"One moment, Mr. Carrington," Cecil said. "You will admit that, if it is proved that a certain person committed this forgery, and if suspicion points to the same person as the one referred to by implication in the message of the prisoner, there will then be a strong presumption in favor of its containing something more than buncombe—at least enough to warrant an investigation into its possible sincerity."

"All the more reason for putting the whole case into the hands of persons trained and competent to ferret the matter out. If we have placed confidence in a man, and he has taken advantage of his position to associate himself with villainy and rob us, let us know at once. Let us give him over to the punishment which his infamy merits."

"But, sir, there may be reasons why we should not care to publish his crime to the world, and why we should wish to shield him from its consequences."

Mr. Powell groaned aloud. His frame quivered as if beneath the scourge.

Unheeding, Mr. Carrington flushed with indignation.

"What?" he cried, bringing his cane down with an angry thump; "compound with a felon! shield a traitor from his just deserts! Mr. Beaumont, I fail to understand you."

"We may feel a personal interest in the delinquent," said the cashier, meaningly.

Again was Mr. Powell racked by a throes of anguish.

Mr. Carrington gazed at the cashier with slow-coming consciousness. Slowly the blood mounted into his forehead, as he said, in a measured voice:

"Mr. Beaumont, speak out what is in your mind. Let us have something more tangible than hints and innuendoes."

"Mr. Carrington," said Cecil, with piercing directness, yet in a voice that apparently trembled with feeling, "the words of Tiger Dick were—'For the sake of your family pride and for the honor of your name.' There lie all the latch-keys of this establishment, save two—one of which Mr. Powell has in his own possession. I do not say that the other cannot be produced. I hope as sincerely as any one that it can. But had we not better look into the matter, before we place it out of our hands—before it gets beyond our control?"

Mr. Powell wrung his hands and sobbed aloud.

The color faded from Mr. Carrington's face; and he drew himself up with flashing eyes and set lips.

"Mr. Beaumont," he said, with stern dignity, "you are making a very grave charge."

"I have made no charges as yet, sir," replied the cashier, respectfully, yet firmly. "I have merely placed facts into such juxtaposition as seems to me to indicate their true significance. I cannot express to you the pain it has cost me to say what it has seemed my duty to say. I can only assure you that no one will feel more relieved and thankful than I, to see evidence produced that shall counteract the present melancholy appearances. You will perceive that I am actuated by motives of consideration for those upon whom this blow will fall, if fail it must. My only aim is to ascertain where the blow will fall, before we submit the matter to the iron hand of the law, which strikes blindly, seeking its victim wherever he is to be found, neither asking, nor caring how many innocent ones it may strike through him."

"Stop a moment, Mr. Beaumont," said Mr. Carrington. "You have dropped a thread. The words of the prisoner may have the significance which you attach to them, or they may be merely selected for effect, the framer imitating the sensational plays to which he had listened. Again, the evidence of the keys has no weight, as there has been no opportunity for the return of the missing one."

"I recognize that fact, sir," admitted Cecil.

"Taken together," pursued Mr. Carrington, "they

only indicate the direction in which suspicion of complicity in this one crime would seem to point. You have yet to adduce evidence that the same person made those imitations and drew that draft."

Mr. Powell stopped his labored breathing, and tried to check the trembling of his frame, to listen. Mr. Carrington sat with hands gripping the head of his cane, lips tightly compressed, brows knit, and eyes on the ground. Cecil spoke as if every word were wrung from him.

"I have told you that I put the pieces of burnt paper in my desk and forgot all about them. Nothing occurred to recall them to mind until yesterday morning. As it was a legal holiday some of the clerks did not come to the bank at all, and the others not until late. I came at the usual hour and found the bank empty. I passed into my bedroom and began to shave, preparatory to setting out for the picnic. I had just got fairly to work, when some one entered the counting-room. Knowing it to be one of the clerks, I did not stop, but kept on until I had finished shaving. As my door was closed, any one in the bank could not hear what slight noise I might make; but I could hear him enter and walk across the floor. When I had finished, I stepped to the door to see who had come in.

"Mr. Frederick Powell was at his desk, not half a dozen steps from my room door. As he heard the door open, he caught up a couple of papers and tossed them into the desk, but not before I had seen that one of them was a letter in his father's handwriting, and that on the other he had been imitating the writing and copying the signature. Then he turned around, flushed very red.

"I then remembered the burnt papers in my desk, and wondered that I had not recognized the writing before, though the truth is, I had not given the matter much thought. I still saw in the fact of copying the signature only curiosity to test one's skill with the pen. I should as soon have thought Frederick capable of any other crime, as of making an improper use of the skill he might thus acquire. So little was I inclined to suspicion that his evident confusion made no lasting impression on my mind, and was soon forgotten. If I thought of it at all, it was to attribute it to shame at being detected in so boyish a practice.

"It was not until to-day, when I found this draft among the others in the morning mail, that a doubt entered my mind. I confess that I was thinking of the words of the message sent by Tiger Dick. Perhaps that assisted my mind to bridge over the immense space between my preconceived notions of Frederick's character and the commission of such a crime. I then recalled his confusion of the morning before, and remembered that the burnt paper was found at about the date of the draft. I got the burnt papers, compared the signatures, and found the writing identical.

"That, sir, is my chain of evidence, with a single reservation, which is Mr. Powell's secret, not mine." Cecil Beaumont ceased speaking, with the air of a man who had performed a painful duty. Mr. Carrington, frowning darkly, preserved silence. The father spoke in a tone of heart-wrung anguish:

"Tell it all. Hold nothing in reserve."

"It is the matter which we discussed three weeks ago," said Cecil, as if willing to spare him the agony of reopening that wound.

"Go on. It must all be told. I can bear it better now than at another time. God help my poor boy!"

"Three weeks ago," resumed Cecil, "Frederick was brought home in a state of intoxication. His father wished to learn something of his associates and habits, and took me into his confidence. While we were discussing the matter, I caught sight of a chum of Frederick's—"

"Oh, God! and such a chum!" groaned the parent, in a quivering voice.

"I called him in," resumed Cecil; "and while Mr. Powell was in my bedchamber, with the door ajar, got him to talking about Frederick, and learned that he had won a hundred dollars the night before from Tiger Dick, the man who was placed under arrest last night, and has as good as admitted himself concerned in the robbery, in all probability its chief.

"This fact supplied the motive. The gambler cannot always be successful. Reverse is sure to come. With it comes the insane desire to retrieve what has been lost. The salary of a bank-clerk, even with the addition of a liberal allowance, cannot sustain such a drain. Forgery is hazardous. The appetite is insatiable. And desperation prompts a bold stroke for a large stake.

"That is the case as it appears to me. No one can lament it more sincerely than I do. No one could be more gladly convinced that he was in error than I."

CHAPTER XI.

DAMNING PROOF.

THERE was a long silence in the banker's private room, after Cecil Beaumont ceased speaking. Mr. Carrington sat in troubled thought, his chin resting on his hands, which were in turn supported by his cane. With his silver locks falling to his shoulders, his grizzled brows darkened by a painful frown, his eyes resting upon the ground, he was the impersonation of condemnation. Mr. Powell leaned forward on his desk, his head bowed upon his arms, his form shaken by throes of anguish—the picture of heart-broken grief. Cecil Beaumont sat near, with the attitude and look of sympathizing sorrow; but from beneath the mask, a devil looked out at his eyes, gloating on the scene of wretchedness before him. One might have taken him for a ghoul—a human vampire. He was thinking of the pistol that rested over his heart, and of a dark-haired woman with downcast eyes and skir drawn aside in scorn.

Presently Mr. Carrington spoke.

"You said, Mr. Beaumont, that Mr. Frederick Powell had before him a letter in his father's handwriting, and a sheet of paper on which he had been imitating the writing; and that, upon your appearance, he slid them into his desk?"

"Yes, sir."

"How long was it before you left the bank?"

"Perhaps half an hour."

"Did you leave Mr. Powell alone in the bank?"

The formal way in which the grandfather spoke of the boy cut the father to the very heart.

"Mr. Farrel and Mr. Worth had come in meanwhile," replied Cecil.

"Mr. Powell also went to the picnic, and must have followed you very soon?"

"He could not have remained very long after me, as I met him on the street a short time subsequent."

"Mr. Beaumont, do you suppose that Mr. Powell had opportunity to destroy the paper on which you saw the imitations, at any time thereafter?"

Cecil hesitated a moment, as if this were a new thought to him.

"I do not know, sir," he said, reflectively. "I do not think he could have done so in the morning. But he may have come to the bank after our return. I did not again visit it until nearly ten o'clock in the evening."

"If he did not destroy the paper in the morning, and did not revisit the bank at night, we will probably find the paper still in his desk."

At this suggestion, Mr. Powell started up with nervous perturbation.

"Let us ascertain at once," he said, hurriedly, rising to his feet. "That will decide the matter, and put an end to this horrible suspense. I can bear it no longer."

"Would you pursue this investigation in the presence of the clerks?" asked Cecil.

Mr. Powell sunk back into his chair, with a tremulous cry of shame and anguish.

"Oh, God! what a depth of infamy! What have I done to deserve such a blow?"

"Send the clerks away," said Mr. Carrington.

"We might dismiss them until afternoon—say two o'clock," suggested the ever-thoughtful cashier.

"That will do," assented the elder gentleman.

Cecil went out and announced the recess. There was some surprise expressed in looks; but the cashier volunteered no explanation, and no questions were asked. All put up their work and withdrew.

As Mr. Powell entered the deserted counting-room, he looked around upon the familiar scene with a piteous expression. Then he sunk into a chair as if unable to stand, and covered his face with his hands.

"We must have a locksmith," suggested Mr. Carrington.

"I will go for one," said Cecil, and immediately took his hat and went out.

Left alone, a dead silence fell between the two occupants of the room, unbroken save by the involuntary moan that escaped with each exhalation of the stricken parent, and by the slow, monotonous *click-click!* of the swaying pendulum.

As footsteps without announced the return of Cecil with the locksmith, a nervous agitation took possession of Mr. Powell, and he rose and withdrew to his private room, to avoid meeting the stranger.

The mechanic soon fitted a key to the lock of Fred's desk. He was then paid and took his departure.

Mr. Powell re-entered the counting-room and sat down as before.

"Mr. Beaumont, oblige us by opening the desk," said Mr. Carrington.

Cecil turned the key and threw back the top of the desk.

A nervous energy animated Mr. Powell. He arose, bent forward, and gazed eagerly into the open desk. Then he shrunk away, as if stung, and fell back into his chair with a great wail of despair.

"Guilty! guilty! Oh, God, the ingratitude! I would have given you all—all to secure your welfare! But to have you betray my love—to know that you have robbed me! Oh, my boy—my poor, misguided boy!"

With head bowed to his knees, he wrung his hands and moaned and sobbed, while tears, such as only a father can shed, watered the ground at his feet.

Harold Carrington, too, gazed into the desk; and the righteous indignation that blazed in his eyes—those eyes that had looked upon three-score years and ten of unswerving integrity—was quenched by the dews of sorrow. His iron frame, that had withstood the storms of seventy winters, now shook beneath the stroke of grief. The head that had been held erect through a long life of uprightness and honor, was now for the first time bowed in shame.

Cecil Beaumont looked into the desk, and saw, just as he himself had placed it, lying loose upon everything else, a sheet of paper covered with the name, "JOHN POWELL, President," and near the bottom an irregular scratch of the pen, as if the writer had been suddenly interrupted. Just beneath it, and shoved a little to one side, was a letter in the handwriting of the true John Powell.

The cashier trembled with suppressed excitement, and his eyelids drooped, to hide the laughing devil that looked from behind the mask.

Suddenly Mr. Carrington was agitated by a storm of bitter indignation, that drove every other feeling from his heart. His breast heaved, his eyes blazed, his grizzled lip quivered with emotion.

"Inebriate—gambler—forger—burglar! It needs but one crime to crown the climax. Let him add murder or suicide to the list, and he will have reached the acme!"

"Stop—stop!" cried the father. "I cannot bear that, even from you!"

He arose, took from the desk the paper that branded his son a forger, folded it in the scraps of burnt paper, and touching a match to it, watched it, as it curled up and blackened in the flames.

"Like most things in this world, it all ends in smoke," said Mr. Carrington, sarcastically.

Mr. Powell turned upon his father-in-law with something of the combative in his tones.

"Mr. Carrington," he said, "I do not depreciate the enormity of this crime. I offer not one word in extenuation. But, however guilty, he is still my son. You cannot expect me to rivet the felon's chains upon him with my own hand."

"It is nothing that I am called upon to compound a felony," said the old man, sturdily. "Right is right, and justice is justice, be it meted out to Jew or Gentile!"

"Sir, you are not unnatural. You have a heart. Cannot you temper your justice with mercy? Remember, we are none of us without sin. And could you commit your own flesh and blood to a prison and chains? Remember, he is Martha's child—Martha, that took such pride in him, and as she held him on her knee, and brushed the hair from his forehead, pictured, with a mother's fond faith in her first-born, the noble manhood that awaited him. Oh, God! does she see him now?"

He broke down again at the remembrance of his wife. And the old man thus appealed to in the

name of his child, was not unmoved. Slowly his eyes filled. Then a tear trickled down his grizzled beard, and fell upon the back of his hand. He gazed at it; and the counting-room, the stricken father, and all the sin and shame and misery of the present, faded from his memory, and in their place came a bright nursery, with a sunny-haired girl, who displayed before him, with all a young mother's pride, her little curly-headed baby-boy, in his first pants and boots; and, as she clapped her hands in glee, cried:

"See! isn't he almost a man?"

"I ask no one to bear my burdens," pursued Mr. Powell. "No one shall suffer in so much as a cent through me or mine. My means are ample enough to cover this whole loss, and it shall be made up to the last mill, though it beggar me."

"John," said his father-in-law, with a tremor of wounded sensibilities in his voice, "that is unworthy of you. You know that I have never given the money a single thought. I would give all that I ever possessed, if it would lighten, by a single shade, the black stain of dishonor that has fallen upon Martha's boy. I have been hard on you, John, and on him—not that I love him less than you do; but the habits of thought of a lifetime are not to be shaken off in a moment; and I have been so proud of him; I have had such bright anticipations of his future, that the crime, in him, seemed of tenfold deeper a dye, than in another. John, take my hand. He is mine as well as yours. We must bear this together."

Mr. Powell wrung the hand of his father-in-law, and, bowing over it, wept like a child.

"Father," he said, "I thank you! I knew that you loved him. But there is one hope we may still cling to. He may not be guilty of this last ingratitude. Let us not condemn him utterly, until he has had a chance to clear himself. He may yet produce his key."

"Pray God that he may!" said the old man, fervently.

While yet they were speaking, a sound of tapping attracted their attention, and turning they beheld Fred looking in at the window.

Instantly every trace of softness left Mr. Carrington's manner, and he again stood forth the judge. Mr. Powell, too, remembered that he was a parent outraged at the tenderest point; and the unmixed grief of a moment before gave place to a look of stern displeasure. Cecil Beaumont's emotions may be gathered from his uttered reflection, which was:

"Curse you! come along. Everything is prime for your reception."

"Admit him, Mr. Beaumont," said the father, in a voice that sounded unnatural to himself. He was thinking: "Why does he wait for us to open the door? Why does he not unlock it and enter without delay?"—and the flush of surprise at seeing him faded away again with the reflection.

CHAPTER XII.

CONDEMNED WITHOUT A HEARING.

IT was late when Fred Powell awoke, after his night's dissipation. What with a splitting headache and remorse of conscience, he was about as wretched as a young man could be. Emerging from the boat-house, he plunged his head into the river, which, before mingling with the turbid waters of the Mississippi, was a limpid stream. Then he went home, to refresh his toilet, where May met him at the door in tears.

"Oh, Fred!" she cried, "where have you been? Something dreadful has happened. The bank was robbed last night, and they have a man in jail whom they suppose to have been concerned in it. They call him Tiger Dick, or something of that sort."

"Tiger Dick!" repeated Fred, and he changed color.

"Yes. And he sent a dreadful message to papa, and you are to go to him immediately."

"To Tiger Dick?" cried Fred, and he drew back, paling, May thought, with guilty fear.

She had listened to the words of Jimmy Duff, and comprehended all that they implied. After the quarrel at the boat-landing between her brother and Cecil, she had said to the latter:

"Why is Fred so bitter against you, Cecil? I am sure you have given him no just cause for dislike."

"It is painful to discuss with a sister her brother's failings," had been Cecil's reply; "but, of course, you are not ignorant of the evil ways into which Fred has fallen of late."

"No; and it has wounded me to the heart to see him fallen so low."

And the sister hung her head in shame at the brother's weakness.

"You know that I always had the kindest of feelings toward Fred," pursued the arch-hypocrite at her side; "and as I saw him going from one excess to another, I felt as if I should do something to save him; but I felt a delicacy about interfering unasked."

"You are always considerate and kind, Cecil," said May. "But your relations with me—" and she blushed slightly and glanced shyly into his face—"gave you the right to warn us."

"At any rate," pursued Cecil, "this bar was removed, when your father came to me for help. Then I called one of Fred's associates into the bank, and, through him, learned all."

"All?" asked May; for her father had told her nothing beyond what had unavoidably come to her knowledge, that Fred had come home in a state of intoxication; and with a natural curiosity she sought to draw the rest from Cecil.

"Yes," he replied, in a sorrowfully-meditative tone, "his association with such fast young men as Billy Saunderson, his dissipation, and, worst of all his frequenting the gambling-hell of Tiger Dick."

"What! my brother a gambler?" cried May, pale and trembling.

Cecil started.

"Why, did you not tell me that you knew all this?" he asked, in apparent surprise.

"Oh, Fred! Fred!" cried the wretched girl, "I would not have believed it of you."

"May," said Cecil, with pretended regret, "I should not have told you of this, but I understood you to say that you knew it already."

"And with that bad man, Tiger Dick—your enemy, Cecil," pursued May, without heeding his words.

"Yes," said Cecil; "and he seems to have gained

such an influence over Fred, that I fear he has poisoned his mind against me. And then Fred learned of my agency in the enlightenment of his father, and hates me on that account, though God knows that it was only to secure his real well-being that I was induced to act."

All this recurred to May's mind, as her brother shrunk away with such a startled look, and cried:

"Is—to Tiger Dick?"

She thought him self-condemned by his actions, and covering her face with her hands, said, brokenly:

"No, no; not to Tiger Dick; but to papa. He is at the bank with grandfather."

Fred Powell, hastened by his sister, not stopping to analyze the sudden emotion that had come over her, ascended to his room. Having rearranged his toilet, he passed out on the street again, and walked toward the business part of the city.

On a corner he came across a group of men discussing the last sensation; and, pretending to look into a shop window, he stopped to listen to their conversation.

"Found 'em trussed up like a pair of Christmas turkeys!" one of them was saying, with a coarse laugh. "And the joke of it was, they made the cashier unlock the strong-box and trot out the spon-doolicks."

"How did they git in without wakin' 'em up?" asked a bystander.

"Skeleton keys," replied the first speaker. "And what about Tiger Dick? They say they've got him in the lock-up."

"Too true!" said the first speaker, with a leer that set the others to laughing.

"And did he have his pockets stuffed with skads?"

"Nary skad! Some is uncharitable enough to think that he had a finger in this pie; but old Powell ain't lodged no complaint yet, and so they can't hold the Tiger for nothing but resisting arrest. You see, he plumped right into the arms of Pat Croghan, comin' out of an alleyway; and as they went to grass together, Pat's noddle had a round with a flagstone. It didn't hurt the stone none, but it built an addition on the back of Pat's head. He was as chipper as you please that night, but this morning he ain't so lively, by a few. They'll hang onto the Tiger until they find out how he's goin' to turn out."

Fred passed on, and as he approached the bank discovered that his keys were not in his possession. He searched in every pocket, but they were not to be found. Then he returned to the boat-house, and from there to his home, but with no better success. Giving them up as lost, he again set out for the bank, unconscious of how much depended upon the possession of them.

The door was opened by Cecil, and Fred passed him by, with ill-concealed contempt.

Mr. Carrington stood erect in the middle of the room, his piercing eyes fixed immovably on Fred's face. The father gazed sadly, wistfully on his son, noting the marks of recent dissipation. Fred saw the condemnation in their looks, and attributing it to displeasure at the dissipation of which he was actually guilty, and knowing nothing of the blighting suspicion that hung over him, stood before them abashed, with hanging head and downcast eyes.

"Father, you wish to see me?" he said, in a low tone, and he looked a criminal on his defense.

Slowly the frown on Mr. Carrington's brow darkened, his piercing gaze became more intense, his bearded lip quivered, and his hand closed over the head of his cane with a tighter gripe. The father gazed upon his boy with humid, bloodshot eyes, and said, in a tone that was almost a sob:

"Where have you been, Frederick? We have been waiting for you over an hour."

The flush of shame deepened on Fred Powell's cheek and his head sunk lower, while a frown of self-hatred knit his brows. Then a look of reckless bravado came into his face. He raised his head, and said, with a swagger:

"I don't try to whitewash my conduct. I had too much to drink last night, and didn't care to go home, so I slept in the club boat-house. I see it's all out. I suppose that smooth-faced hypocrite yonder has been spying upon me again."

Not the open avowal of degradation, nor yet the spiteful fling at Cecil, but the swagger in his manner and the one word of slang in his first sentence set the blood to seething in the veins of old Mr. Carrington. As it had never done with age, his tall form shook and swayed beneath the storm of indignation that threatened at every moment to burst forth.

Cecil Beaumont could afford to forego the resentment of any sting from his writhing victim; and though a flush of anger swept to the roots of his hair at the opprobrious epithet, he curbed his feelings, and said, with an air of forbearance and misjudged friendship:

"Mr. Powell, I can overlook your insult, considering the circumstances under which it is uttered. But, sir, although I long since saw and deprecated your downward course, I refrained from interfering, through feelings of delicacy, until your father came to me. Then, he knows with what reluctance I said aught that would bring you under his displeasure."

"Stop!" thundered Mr. Carrington, rising, with the majesty of righteous indignation and outraged forbearance. "An honest man must not stand on his defense before such a knave! Where, sir, is your key to yonder door?"

The old man towered aloft like some judging spirit, the veins standing out on his forehead in knots, his eyes blazing, his snow-white beard quivering as it rested on his breast, his arm outstretched and the long, vibrant finger pointing to the bank door.

Mr. Powell started up and stretched out his hands, as if to avert the storm from the head of his son. For a moment Fred shrunk beneath the stinging lash of the old man's rage. Then his eyes began to flash, his form to dilate, until he stood as erect, as haughty as his accuser.

"Sir," he said, giving him glance for glance, "I do not recognize your right to command me!"

"Frederick! Frederick!" cried his father, with clasped hands, "for God's sake, produce the key!"

"Why should I produce it?" demanded the son.

"Do not ask me; but for the love of Heaven, give it to me—if you can!"

The last three words fell from the father's lips like a wail of despair.

Understanding nothing of what lay beneath the intense excitement of those before him—bewildered,

touched by the wild agony of his father's tones—Fred turned toward him with a look of wondering compassion, and there was a tremor of tenderness in his voice, as he said:

"Father, I do not know why you ask me for the key in such a tone. But I cannot give it to you. It is not in my possession. I have lost it."

"Pah!" aspirated the old man, with a sneer of seething contempt and incredulity.

"Oh, God! he has not the key!" groaned the anguished father.

"Why do you ask me for the key? I tell you I have lost it. I had it last night, but this morning I cannot find it."

"Boy! boy!" cried the old man, white with wrath and indignation, "do not add lying and hypocrisy to your other crimes. If you are not prepared to make confession, do not hold out the plea of innocence—do not try to palm off upon us so shabby a pretext."

More and more bewildered, only beginning to realize vaguely that some terrible crime was imputed to him, outraged in feelings that the case should be prejudged and he be deemed guilty without the opportunity of a defense, Fred retorted with clenched fists, white lips and quivering nostrils:

"Old man, your gray hairs plead for you, else should no consideration of relationship save you from the weight of my arm!"

"Speak not of our relationship! The claim of consanguinity with such as you were a disgrace to the hangman! See! I repudiate you, now and forever!"

The old man made a gesture of royal disdain, as with a wave of his hand he severed the ties that had bound them. It was as if he cast from him some loathsome reptile.

"I care nothing for your repudiation!" retorted Fred, with no falling off of spirit; "nor have I the faintest idea of what actuates you to such a step. But, whatever may be the crimes at which you so darkly hint, I declare that their imputation to me is false—utterly false!"

This reiterated denial goaded the old man to a frenzy of indignation. Leaning forward and beating a tattoo with his extended forefinger on the draft that lay upon the desk, he demanded, with blazing eyes:

"Frederick Powell, did you sign that draft?"

Hedged in on every side by lowering clouds of suspicion, expecting an attack from every quarter, Fred gazed upon the draft in stupefaction. A wave of crimson surged to the roots of his hair; and the father seeing it, and interpreting it as the confusion of detected guilt, groaned aloud. Then it receded, leaving him pale as death, with a leaden ring about his lips. Shrinking a step backward, and still gazing upon the paper, as if with fascination, he said, in a bewildered, frightened voice:

"I—sign—that—draft? I do not understand you? What do you mean?"

"Look at him!" cried the old man, in a rasping voice. "It is proved as clear as day! And yet he stands here before us, with the face of an angel of innocence, save for the pallor of confounded guilt, and says: 'I—sign—that—draft? I do not understand you. What do you mean?' Ah! you are dull of comprehension!"

The stinging, incisive sarcasm of the old man was emphasized by his leaning forward and shaking his silver locks, as he hurled these bitter words at his grandson.

To Fred, it seemed as if he were being drawn steadily, irresistibly, into a maelstrom of suspicion. He turned to his father with a wild appeal.

"Father! father! what is this?"

"Oh, my boy! my poor, poor boy!" groaned the distracted parent.

"Believe me, father, I am innocent!" cried Fred, with tears of despair in his eyes.

"Prove it, Frederick—prove it!"

"How can I? I know not of what I am accused."

"Oh, *saintly* innocence!—*infantile* ignorance!" sneered the old man.

Fred turned upon him as if stung.

"What is my crime?" he demanded.

"What is your crime?" repeated Mr. Carrington; and drawing a deep breath, and summoning all the energies of his nature, he thundered at his grandson the words: "Drunkenness—gambling—forgery—complicity in plundering the father who gave you being! I say nothing of crimes that the law does not reach, but none the less infamous on that account—base treachery and ingratitude, and a persistent effrontery of falsehood without parallel!"

Stunned by this arraignment, Fred reeled backward and leaned gasping against a desk.

"Oh, my son," moaned the wretched father, "I could have forgiven you all—all but the ingratitude! Have I ever denied you anything that was for your good? Had you come to me, I would have doled out my blood, drop by drop, to secure your happiness. And now to have you turn upon me—oh, God!"

"Father! father!" pleaded the son, with outstretched hands.

But he waved him off.

"Go, boy, go! I cannot bear to look upon you!"

At that, Fred drooped, as under a blight.

"And May, even May, believes me guilty! I saw it in her face!" he said, in a husky voice.

And then, blinded with tears, and with an awful look of despair in his face, Fred Powell groped his way to the bank door and passed out and down the street, he knew not, nor cared, whither.

Cecil Beaumont turned and followed him with his eyes. Outwardly, he was grieved to the soul; but beneath the mask, the laughing devil capered and giped in frantic glee.

As the door closed upon the bowed form of the outcast son, all the iron of Harold Carrington's nature melted away; and bending until his head rested upon the shoulder of the stricken father, and his arm lay along his neck, and while his own voice quavered and broke, he said:

"Bear up, John; bear up. We have shouldered many a burden together; and we can bear this between us, can't we?"

CHAPTER XIII.

HOW SHE TRUSTED HIM.

WHEN Fred Powell left the presence of his father, it was with a feeling of stunned, dizzy bewilderment. Then a chilling sense of awful desolation settled down upon him, enveloping him like a cloud. With-

out purpose, he plunged into the ebb and flow of the bustling street, instinctively seeking that relief which the burdened spirit finds in physical activity.

People whom he passed turned to look again at his white face and wild air; but he was so much engrossed by the fiery tumult within, that he did not heed them, until one stopped and slapped him on the shoulder, as he was about to pass on.

"Hollo, Fred!" cried the voice of Billy Saunderson; "what's the row? Demmy, if you don't look like a three days' corpse, acting as chief mourner at its own funeral. Gads, man, you've got a face on you to frighten children into saying their prayers twice a day, reg'lar. Come and have something to tone up your nerves."

"No, no, Saunderson; nothing for me," said Fred, with a shudder; and with a hurried "Good-morning," he passed on.

"Now, if I'm any judge of beauty," mused the "decoy duck," following Fred with his eyes, "the false key that is supposed to have admitted the burglars, is none other than the key that so mysteriously disappeared from the possession of William Saunderson, book-keeper, on the same eventful evening. But what makes the gentle Freddy look like the ghost of Hamlet, or like a candidate for a lunatic asylum?—that's what I want to know. Well, any way, I've got a greenback, if not a silver lining to my cloud; so—'Up in a balloon, boys, up in a balloon!'"

And he went whistling down the street.

After that, Fred caught the curious eyes fixed upon him; and with an awful haunted feeling, as if his degradation, emblazoned on his forehead, drew the finger of scorn from every quarter, he fled from his fellow-men, out of the thronged thoroughfares, to the quiet streets of the suburbs, and then on to the deserted country road, bordered here by unbragous woods, and there by waving grain, or tasseled maize, flashing back the sunlight from its thousand lances; and, seen through breaks in the timber that followed the watercourse, the broad stretch of level prairie, dotted with farmhouses; and beyond all, the hills, looming blue in the distance.

Instinctively he avoided his home, and passed on, until he found himself in the vicinity of her who was dearest on earth to him. Then, with a shudder, he plunged into the depths of the wood, taking a path that carried him on beyond, and finally emerging upon the river-bank. Here he threw himself down, and gave himself up to moody thought.

Presently there were sounds of horse's feet, coming down the road at a canter. They stopped suddenly, opposite the spot where he lay. Then they entered the grove that divided the road from the stream, and drew up at his side. A light form slid from the saddle and crouched at his side, and girlish eyes looked into his with a glad smile.

He was so abstracted that he did not heed her, until she sunk at his side, and clasping his arm with her hands, looked up into his face. Then he started violently.

"Florence!"

Instantly all the bright happiness died out of her face, to give place to pale anxiety.

"Fred, dear Fred, what is the matter?" she cried, earnestly.

A spasm of pain shot through his heart, as he turned away his face.

"Nothing, Florence—nothing," he said. He was thinking, "She will doubt me, like the rest."

"But, dear, there is—there must be," she persisted, in a tremulous voice.

She took hold of his other shoulder and drew him around, until she could look into his downcast, pained face. The haggard cheeks and hollow eyes, with dark rings about them, pierced her to the heart; and with her cheek against his arm and her tearful eyes reading his face, she panted:

"Tell me!—tell me!"

With infinite longing he gazed into the face that looked so lovingly, pleadingly into his. Then with a sudden burst he caught her to his heart.

"Florence," he cried, "do you love me—really—truly? Could nothing chill your affection—shake your confidence in me?"

"Fred, what a question!" she exclaimed, in bewilderment.

"Do you trust me utterly?" he went on, with increasing heat. "Would you believe in me, though all the world should turn against me—father, sister, all? Could you stand by my side in prison—on the very scaffold—and while all around were hurling jeers of hatred and contempt at me, could you then place your hand in mine and say, 'I know that you are innocent? I love—I trust you more than ever?'"

"Fred! Fred!" she cried, clinging to him, "you are wild! Oh, tell me what terrible thing has happened!"

"Say!" he repeated, unconsciously shaking her in his excitement, "do you love me—trust me—like that?"

His passion calmed her. She saw that he was frantic for this assurance which he asked. And with heaving bosom, and face irradiated with such a love as only a woman can feel, she placed a hand on either shoulder, and holding him thus at arm's length, and gazing straight into his eyes, said:

"Frederick, I love you more than a sister, more than a father, more than a mother! I trust you as I trust my God!"

With a tremulous cry of ecstasy, he caught her to his heart again, and clasping her close, as if he would merge her body into his, he murmured:

"Oh, if I could take you away—away—where you would never know—where you could never hear!"

"It will make no difference. I shall never believe a word. I shall love you all the more because you are wronged. My love shall avail against all that can be brought upon you."

"Did not my sister love me? And yet she covered her face with her hands and was silent. Did not my father love me? You should have seen him writhe and quail beneath the cruel conviction that forced itself upon him. It cut me to the soul to hear his heartbroken voice and see his head bowed in anguish, when he spoke of my ingratitude. He could forgive me all—all—but his wounded love. Yet when I said, 'I am innocent!' he turned away and said, 'Go—go! I cannot bear to look upon you!' Both loved me, yet both doubted me."

"But I will not! Oh, believe me, my darling, I

will not! Though the whole world turn against you, I will love you—I will believe you innocent!"

"I am innocent, Florence—I am innocent!"

"I know it! I know it! But tell me of what you are accused."

"No! no! I could not bear to see your face pale with horror—to feel you withdraw in loathing from my arms!"

"But, knowing you innocent, the enormity of the crime alleged would make me cling all the closer to you, the more you needed my love and confidence."

"No. Go to my father. He will lay the matter before you. Then, if you still believe, come back to me. When, stunned by the charge, I had scarcely power to deny it, my mother's father—and he has always loved me only next to my own—maddened by what he thought my persistence in falsehood, cried, 'It is proved as clear as day! And yet he stands before us with the face of an angel of innocence, save for the pallor of confounded guilt!' No flimsy evidence could convince him so positively."

"But he is only your grandfather, Frederick. He had not a woman's love and a woman's instincts to guide him. The evidence is false and must have some weak point. Trust me, my love will find it out. But though it be as inaccessible as the battlements of heaven, yet I will never be shaken by it. But tell me of what you are accused. I can bear it better from your lips."

"I cannot! I cannot! Go to my father. He will tell you all."

"But how was suspicion thrown upon you?"

"I do not know. But whatever be the plot, Cecil Beaumont is at the bottom of it—depend upon it, Cecil Beaumont is at the bottom of it! And when I accused him of treachery, and he began some of his smooth hypocrisy, my grandfather, blinded by the glamour of falsehood that he had cast before his eyes, cried: 'Stop! An honest man must not stand on his defense before such a knave!'"

"I know that he hates you, my poor darling! and knowing it, I shall not be the dupe of his dissimulation. No, I will trace every thread of evidence to its source, knowing that it must ultimately lead to falsehood. Let us delay no longer. I am all impatience to begin the work. Every moment is an age of torture!"

She arose eagerly. Fred arose also.

"One moment, my darling," he said. "Give me one moment of perfect love and trust. When you have gone from me, how do I know that I shall ever enjoy another?"

He held out his arms. She sprung into them, clinging close to his neck.

"Oh! when I trust you so utterly, why do you doubt me?" she whispered.

"I will not! I will not!" he cried, with his lips to hers. "God bless you, my heart's darling! and aid you in your labor of love!"

Then he lifted her into her saddle, still clinging to her, as if he could not bear to part with her. A moment she bent forward, and with her arms about his neck, blended caresses and words of consolation and hope. Then she gathered up the reins.

"Come to me to-night in the arbor," she said, and was gone.

CHAPTER XIV.

A TRIAL OF FAITH.

JOHN POWELL sat in his private room at the bank, forcing himself to attend to the business which his position demanded of him, though his heart ached and his head swam with dizziness. He had schooled his features to hide from the world as much as possible the anguish that was tugging at his heart, yet there was a humility of the eyes and a piteous curve of the mouth that were painful to behold.

A carriage drove up to the side entrance, and a lady alighted and ascended the steps. She was dressed in dark robes, whose flowing grace lent majesty to her form. Her black hair was brushed back from a pure white brow; and there was a look of resolute purpose in her dark eyes and on her red lips, in keeping with her bearing.

Charley Brewster met her at the door and greeted her as:

"Miss Goldthorp!"

"Show me to Mr. Powell, if you please," she said; and was ushered into the banker's private room, passing the cashier without a look.

Cecil Beaumont arose and passed into his bed-chamber. He dared not stay and risk the others' seeing the flush of crimson that dyed his forehead, and the diabolical scowl that came to his brow despite his efforts to repress it.

"Go on, my lady," he muttered, between his clenched teeth. "A steady purpose has been forming in my mind with relation to you. Queen it while you may. You shall yet be my slave!"

But then his feelings underwent a sudden revolution. The clenched hands relaxed; the flush of anger on his cheek gave place to the pallor of an indescribable pain; the fire of rage in his eyes was drowned by a sudden gush of tears.

"Oh! I love you! I love you!" he cried. "One smile—one touch of your hand in kindness—and I would drain my heart, drop by drop, before harm should come to a single hair of your head! But your scorn maddens me—makes me a devil!"

Careless, as ignorant, of his emotions, Florence Goldthorp entered the presence of the banker. He arose, and with a courtly grace that was a part of his nature, led her to a seat, greeting her with a surprised yet welcoming smile.

"Mr. Powell," she began, "I make no apology for calling upon you at this time and place with the business that calls me here, because I know that your interest in your son transcends that which you may feel in mere business engagements. I should shrink from opening so painful a subject as this must be to you, but that my interest in him is even greater than your own. To show that I have a right to know what I am about to seek, I will state that I am his plighted wife. Loving him and trusting him without a shadow of reservation, it is my purpose to acquaint myself with the crime alleged against him and the evidence sustaining the charge, and then to proceed to clear him from the cloud of suspicion now hanging over him."

There was a ring of confidence in her even, steady tones that thrilled Mr. Powell. But he saw in it the blind devotion of love, and would not let it avail against the convictions of judgment. More than

that, she avowed herself ignorant even of the crime charged.

"Miss Goldthorp," he replied, in a feeling tone, "I am both pleased and pained at what you have said—pleased at the noble purpose that does your heart so much credit; pained—and you can conceive what it costs me, as a father, to say it—pained that such a love as yours should be thrown away upon so unworthy an object."

"I shall not now endeavor to combat your opinion, sir, though confident that it is fatally mistaken. My first aim is to ascertain what is alleged against your son. The subject was too painful for him, and he sent me to you."

"Miss Goldthorp, you will readily see that it can be scarcely less painful to me to go over this sad history. If you will not take it as a discourtesy, I would beg to refer you to Mr. Beaumont. He is wholly in my confidence in this matter; as thoroughly conversant with all the facts as myself; and, being less vitally interested, can lay them before you more coherently."

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Powell," said Florence, with a sudden pallor of cheek and flash of eye; "I cannot explain at present, but I cannot meet Mr. Beaumont in this matter."

"I see, my poor girl, that Frederick has poisoned your mind against Mr. Beaumont; but I assure you he has acted, in everything, as a gentleman and as a friend to the best interests of my misguided son."

"Spare me this discussion, Mr. Powell. Is there no one else to whom I may go for the facts and allegations?"

At this moment, a firm step and the regular fall of a cane was heard in the outer room.

"Here is Mr. Carrington," said the banker; and as he entered, addressed him: "Father, you will bear with me if I shift a painful office to your shoulders. I am going out, and will leave you and this dear girl together. Tell her all that she wishes to know. You will excuse me, Miss Goldthorp; I go to keep an appointment."

As the banker withdrew, Mr. Carrington laid aside his hat and cane, and seated himself on a sofa. Florence ran and sat down beside him. He removed her hat, and drawing her head to his shoulder and kissing her tenderly on the brow, he said, while he caressed her glossy hair with his hand:

"Well, what is it, my little girl? What do you wish to know?"

"Dear Mr. Carrington," said Florence, with tears in her eyes, "what dreadful suspicion is resting against Frederick?"

"You call him Frederick?" asked the old man, with a look of regret.

"He is my affianced husband," was the low reply. He drew her closer, and patted her head with a fatherly caress that was like a benediction.

"This is a sad world we live in," he said, with tears in his eyes, and in a voice as gentle as a woman's. "How little we can read the future. How little we know how many hearts will be blighted by one act of sin."

"Don't! don't!" pleaded the girl, piteously. "I can't bear to hear you speak in that way. You are condemning him."

"Florence," said the old man, "I need not now tell you how I love you. Years and years ago, when your father's father was a lad, we played with the same ball, eat from the same dinner-basket, and studied from the same books. The desire of our hearts was not carried out. Our blood was not destined to mingle in the first generation. My darling Martha and your father did not love each other, as we prayed that they might. Then my hopes centered in Martha's child and in you."

"I cannot express to you, my child, the joy of seeing the hope of a long life, once disappointed, at last approaching its fulfillment. With such emotions I noticed the boy's growing embarrassment when alone in your presence, and the quick flush and pallor of your cheek, if by chance his hand unexpectedly touched yours. I prayed that you might love each other; I saw it approaching, day by day; and now, in the answer to my prayer I recognize the bitterest blow of all. I sought to bless Charley's grandchild; and, in my blindness I prayed for what will prove a curse!"

With a tremulous cry, she put her hand on his lips. "Stop! oh, stop!" she cried, wildly; for it seemed as if he were cursing her lover. "You do not know! He is innocent! Oh, believe me, he is innocent!"

"My poor, poor child!—Charley's child! how my heart bleeds for you!" murmured the old man, tears trickling down his snowy beard and falling on her raven hair.

"Oh! will you not cease? Do not you see that you are tearing my heart by persisting in such inflexible condemnation? Tell me of what he is accused. He could not, he was so cut to the heart."

"You have seen him?"

"Yes; and so bowed to the earth beneath the load of injustice that even your cold judgment must have faltered."

"And did he not tell you his crime—nay, crimes?"

"Stop! I will not listen to you!" she cried, with a burst of passionate indignation. "You speak of him as a criminal, guilty and already convicted of the act. I did not ask you for that. Tell me the accusation—nay, the lying, villainous calumny that has been brought against him, and reserve your judgment!"

"Did not he tell you the charges?" asked the old man, humoring her.

"No! I tell you he could not! He was wild with grief and despair! Your barbarity had crushed him!"

"The boy has some good in him. He could not bear to blast your happiness with his own lips—or was it that he dared not?"

His mind was not as flexible as a younger man's would have been. Conviction was rooted deep in his nature, and he could not open his mouth without condemning his grandson.

She stamped her foot in an ebullition of rage.

"Out upon you for a coward yourself! You profess to love me for the sake of my father and of my father's father, yet you mock my grief. It was by such cold, adamant prejudice that you goaded him to the verge of madness!"

Then she broke down and fell to weeping hysterically.

"Forgive me! forgive me, my child!" murmured the old man, gathering her to his breast again. "If

I am hard upon him, it is because my love for him was so strong, and this terrible blow has cloven clear down to the quick. I have embarked all my hopes in a single ship, and I see it before me a total wreck. Loving him as I do, could I do him an injustice?"

"No, no; not wittingly. But you were blinded by appearances; you deemed him guilty; and would not listen to what he had to say."

"He was dumb. He could say nothing."

"Stunned by the bitterness of your denunciation. But the charges—what are they?"

"I cannot bring myself to wound you by the rehearsal of them."

"But do not you see that this suspense is killing me? I know that it is all a base fabrication—a conspiracy to ruin him. I will bring the facts to light, and drag the infamous perpetrators to punishment. Tell me of what he is accused, I entreat you!"

The old man shook his head in sorrow, as he yielded to her demand; and holding her hand in his, and regarding her with a look of almost infinite compassion, he said:

"First, of drunkenness!"

"Impossible!"

She started back with such a look of incredulity as Mary might have given, had she been told that the Son of God was an impostor.

"It is bitter, heartrending truth!" said the old man, with his head resting in his hand and his eyes on the ground.

"Who are his accusers?"

"Do not put it in that way. They are near and dear ones. They would not accuse him, though they broke their hearts in grief over his sin."

"The witnesses, then?"

"His father—his sister! He was brought to them almost insensible with alcohol; he slept in their presence like a brute!"

"Oh, God!"

She fell back against the wall, breathless, almost lifeless; and when he tried to comfort her, she wrung her hands, and wept and moaned as if her heart would break.

"Forgive me, oh, my child!" said the old man. "I should not have yielded to you. I knew that you were not strong enough to bear it."

"No, no! I am strong—I will be strong! Tell me all—"

"My poor girl, do not pursue this further."

"I must! I will!" she almost screamed. "Tell me all! I will know all! What next?—do you hear?—what next?"

"Gambling!" said the old man, in despair.

"Never! Never! It is a base, infamous lie!"

"He confessed it to his father!"

She looked at him in a deadly calm—a white horror that froze her face to marble. She could not doubt his veracity; she doubted the evidence of her senses.

"What?" she asked, in a hoarse whisper.

"He confessed it to his father!" repeated Mr. Carrington.

She said not a word. She sat rocking to and fro, staring dumbly, not at him, but away beyond him, into vacancy.

The old man was awed by her unutterable woe. He was terrified by the unnatural calm that was upon her. If she would weep and moan, it would relieve her. But this fearful tension—it could not last; she would go mad.

"Florence! Florence!" cried Mr. Carrington, shaking her.

She looked at him without seeming to recognize him, as people gaze in their sleep.

He shook her again.

"Florence, for God's sake, arouse! Do not look at me in that way!"

She recovered herself with a long-drawn sigh. She looked at him as quietly as before, but now with intelligence in her eyes.

"Thank God! you are yourself again!" he murmured, fervently.

"Is that all?" she asked, in a quiet, even tone of voice, from which every vestige of excitement and passion had vanished.

"Desist, my poor girl. Give up this vain pursuit. It is beyond your strength, and can only end in wretchedness and disappointment."

"Mr. Carrington, I am forced to credit what you have told me thus far; but these are not the only charges, and I am resolved to combat this arraignment at every point. I will yield to nothing but absolute, indubitable proof. If there is the shadow of a doubt, it shall be viewed in every phase; it shall be sifted to its ultimate particles; it shall be followed out in every detail. As for the rest, nothing can affect me after what you have told me; I can now look calmly upon this horror in its most monstrous forms; I shall have strength to pursue it unflinchingly to the end. Go on. What is next?"

"Florence, I beg of you to let this matter drop. All of your noble resolve cannot alter the bitter truth. It can only fall back upon your heart in chilling defeat and disappointment."

"Mr. Carrington, look at me!" and she drew herself up with flashing eyes and dilating bosom, a very queen in her indomitable strength of purpose. "Do I look like a woman to be lightly turned from the path which she has marked out for herself? I tell you, my heart and brain—my whole being is enlisted in this work. I will succeed! I know that I am in the right! Sir, he stood before me, and with a look in his eyes that guilt could never simulate, said: 'Florence, I am innocent—I am innocent!' Do you think that anything can shake my confidence in him after that? No, never! nothing but absolute, indisputable demonstration. I told him that I trusted him as I trusted my God. I repeat it—my confidence in him at this moment is as deep, as unshaken as my belief in the beneficence of the all-wise Father!"

"And yet, can you question the fact of his drunkenness—his gambling?"

"He did not refer to these. There is some other charge, that so far has overshadowed them that they were not present to his mind when he spoke. And now, sir, if you refuse to enlighten me further, I must appeal again to his father; for know the rest, I will!"

"It is useless to oppose you. I hesitated only through kindness."

"I believe you, sir; but it was mistaken kindness. Pray proceed. What is the next charge?"

"Forgery!"

An icy shiver ran through her frame; there was a quivering tension of all the muscles; the blood ebbed away, leaving her like a corpse; and then she sat perfectly still.

"Has he confessed this, too?" she asked, in icy tones.

"Not in words, but by his looks and actions."

A sudden flash came into her eyes; the blood flowed back to her face; and she leaned forward and rested her hand on Mr. Carrington's knee.

"Stop right here!" she said, eagerly. "Who is his accuser?"

"No one accuses him. Mr. Beaumont—"

"Ha! Mr. Beaumont! Oh, the villain! the base, lying hypocrite!"

"Florence, you are unjust. That unfortunate boy has biased your mind. If you let prejudice rule your judgment, you will never attain the truth. Mr. Beaumont has—"

"I know him better than you do. I repeat that he is a willful calumniator—an unscrupulous intriguer, plotting to secure his own ends!"

"But, my dear, he cannot alter the truth," said the old man, with a sad smile of indulgence.

"No; but he can so mold appearances as to give them the semblance of truth."

"But the motive?"

"Hatred of Frederick—a determination to ruin him."

She did not tell him of the rivalry between Cecil and Fred. Perhaps it would not have moved him if she had, so firm was his conviction.

"My dear girl," he replied, "no one could have displayed more friendly consideration than has Mr. Beaumont, from the very first. No one could be more reluctant to bring dishonor upon one whom he has long esteemed as a friend."

"Oh! the arch hypocrite!"

"Florence, see how unjust you are. Although all along knowing of the boy's excesses, Mr. Beaumont never breathed a word of them until Frederick's father went to him for assistance in ascertaining the facts."

"Far better had he taken the Father of Evil into his counsel."

"Be reasonable, girl. Cannot you see that it was for Frederick's good? Yet he hesitated to bring him under the displeasure of his father. With equal reluctance did he lay before us the incontrovertible facts that fastened upon the wretched boy the guilt of forgery."

"And what were those facts—alleged?"

She persisted in the expression of her disbelief.

"He produced two pieces of half-burnt paper, which he had found in the stove, and on which Frederick had imitated his father's signature."

"He produced two pieces of paper, which he had found, and on which (he said) Frederick had imitated his father's signature!" repeated Florence, with stinging emphasis.

Mr. Carrington waved his hand.

"On which some one had been imitating Mr. Powell's signature. Then he produced a draft, cashed in Chicago, returned to us in this morning's mail along with several others, and entered with them in the advice accompanying. That draft was a forgery. Upon comparison, the signature on the draft and the imitations on the pieces of burnt paper proved identical."

"Well?"

"Yesterday morning, while Mr. Beaumont was shaving in his dressing-room, some one entered. When Mr. Beaumont stepped to the door to learn who had come in, he saw Frederick—"

"Says that he saw him!"

"Says that he saw him thrust two sheets of paper into his desk, one of which was a letter in Mr. Powell's handwriting, the other bore imitations of his signature."

"Have you looked? Are they there?"

She bent forward, eager, breathless.

"We looked! They were there!"

She sunk back, stunned again into that icy calm.

"Again were the signatures compared. Again did they prove identical."

She recovered herself with a long-drawn, tremulous breath.

"Mr. Carrington," she said, with quiet directness, "he never burned those pieces of paper; he never signed that draft; he never put into his desk that letter and the sheet bearing the spurious signatures!"

Again Mr. Carrington smiled—but, oh, such a sad smile! He could see in her reiteration only the blind persistency of self-deluding love.

"My poor child, on that sheet the boy had carelessly thrown off his own signature, evidently wearying with the labor of imitation; and the last copy was but half done, ending in a scratch of the pen, where he had started at the interruption of Mr. Beaumont's appearance."

"Mr. Carrington," persisted Florence, "I recognize in this only a fatal mistake, or a terrible fraud! I trust him as I trust my God!"

The old man did not try to reason with her. He only caressed her hair.

"Go on," she said. "Is there anything else?"

"Spare me!—spare yourself!" pleaded Mr. Carrington.

"I cannot. I must know all."

"Florence, I would save you the pain of this last; but you force me to speak. Steel your heart, my child, for the cruel blow. It will call for all your strength. You know that last night the bank was plundered. Frederick Powell was a party to the robbery of the father who loved him—who trusted him, as you trust him now!"

Mr. Carrington was surprised at the effect of his words. Florence looked into his face and smiled.

"Oh, Mr. Carrington, this is too absurd!" she said.

"Incredible as it seems, it is the melancholy truth."

"You cannot be in earnest. Why should he give his father's money to strangers?"

"Do not you see when a man begins to squander his money in dissipation and gambling, it creates an increased demand for it? No young man's salary could long stand such a drain. He could not hope to commit forgery successfully more than once or twice. Here was a chance to get a large supply; and Tiger Dick, the man at whose table he gambled, was ready to tempt him."

"But why take Frederick into company with him?"

If disposed to commit the robbery, why not do it on his own account, and secure all the money to himself? No man would rob his own father without the inducement of a very disproportionate share of the spoils."

"Through Frederick he could learn the interior arrangements of the bank, and in case of detection, could use him as a shield. Through him he did learn the night when Mr. Beaumont slept at the bank; through him he secured the means of noiseless entrance; and having been captured, he was ready for the contingency, and will now escape, because the father cannot brand his son a felon."

"Tell me the whole story—Frederick's connection with it, and the part played by Mr. Beaumont."

Mr. Carrington detailed to her the incidents of the robbery and the conversation with Jimmy Duff. Then she stopped him.

"You say that they brought a kit of burglar's tools with them, and upon hearing a breathing in Mr. Beaumont's room, they asked the janitor if any one else slept in the bank. A short time since you stated that they already knew of Mr. Beaumont's presence on that particular night, from Frederick."

"That was a mere ruse, to hide their knowledge of the situation of affairs, lest its thoroughness should give rise to the suspicion that they were in collusion with some one connected with the bank."

"But the janitor and Mr. Beaumont were under the impression, at first, that false keys were used. What proof is there to the contrary?"

"The bold, dictatorial tone of Tiger Dick. Of what use would it be to make so shallow a pretense, and one which could not stand a moment, if only a pretense?"

"And what said Frederick?" asked Florence, the old anxiety returning to her face. It seemed as if the meshes of this terrible snare were slowly closing about her lover, binding him limb and limb.

"At first he grew violent, when required to give up his keys, and resorted to equivocation. Afterward he stated that he had lost them."

Mr. Carrington did not mean to misrepresent his grandson; but his words conveyed the impression that he had received, rather than what had actually occurred during the fiery scene of the morning. He did not know it; but his words gave Florence the severest blow she had received since told that Fred had confessed his gambling to his father. Why had he been violent? Why had he resorted to equivocation? These were the questions that kept buzzing in her brain, making the blood set back upon her heart in a crushing tide. She never once thought of doubting the truth of his grandfather's representation, so far as he spoke from actual observation.

"Here is another thing that you should see," said Mr. Carrington; and crossing the room, he took an envelope from the desk and placed the contents in her lap.

They were a photograph and a letter. Florence glanced at the photograph and instantly recognized the keys which she knew Fred to carry. Then she took up the letter.

It read:

JOHN POWELL, Esq.:

DEAR SIR:—Being somewhat reluctant to part with the original documents, I send you herewith a copy which will scarcely need to be verified by certificate. Assuming that these credentials establish my right to recognition as an independent beligerent, and as a power suitable to be treated with after the ordinary forms, I propose the following terms of recapitulation, to show that I am willing to do the square thing. 1st. To be returned (in such manner and at such time and place as shall hereafter be agreed upon) your dutiful son's share in the plunder, as stipulated, to wit, one-third (1/3), in consideration of services rendered. 2d. Besieged to march out with their side-arms, and no questions asked.

[Seal.]

TIGER DICK,
Gen. Commanding.

FORT DE CROSS-BAR, }
July 5th, 18—.

Florence read this characteristic missive with dry eyes, and laid it aside with a weary, almost despairing gesture.

"It was brought here an hour before your arrival," said Mr. Carrington.

She did not reply, but took up the photograph, and sat looking at it until the tears welled into her eyes and trickled down her cheeks. It was the relief she so much needed.

CHAPTER XV. AN ALLIANCE.

For a long time Florence Goldthorp sat in tearful silence. Then arousing herself and laying aside the photograph, she said:

"Mr. Carrington, will you let me see the pieces of burnt paper and the other sheet with the copied signatures?"

"I cannot. They were destroyed."

"Destroyed?"

"His father burned them. He could not bear to let the evidences of his son's guilt remain in existence."

"But, sir, was it not important for future investigation that they be preserved?"

"Where certainty has been reached, what room is there for further investigation? He could only bury the matter, and try to forget."

"Oh, sir! upon how fatal a basis have you proceeded! It is not for me to remind one of your age how little of certainty there is in this world—how easy it is to be mistaken. You have trusted to the infallibility of your judgment, and let the record of a whole life be overthrown by the circumstances of a day. Was your confidence in Frederick ever shaken before this morning?"

"No. But fact is fact, however much we may be deceived about it. When Copernicus declared that the world moved, it moved just as surely as if all the ages that had gone before had not supposed it stationary. I do not imagine the boy to have reached his present position at a stride. His father knew of his downward course three weeks ago; his companions, earlier; I discovered it only to-day."

She turned away with a sickening sense of despair. She seemed met at every point by a wall of adamant.

"At least you preserved the draft?" she asked, but without hope.

"That, too, was subsequently destroyed."

"There is nothing more you can tell me, Mr. Carrington?"

"Nothing; only that, of course, Mr. Powell will pay no attention to the proposal of Tiger Dick. He cannot prosecute him; but neither can he publish to the world the acknowledgment of his son's guilt, by accepting the return of any part of the money."

Florence rose wearily, and thanking him for the information he had given, and bidding him good-afternoon, withdrew. In her carriage, with the curtains drawn, she buried her face in her hands in pained thought.

Half-way home she stopped her coachman, and directed him to the residence of Mrs. Brewster, Charley's mother. She sat erect, now, with her eyes full of earnest purpose.

"Mrs. Brewster," she said, upon meeting that lady, "will you kindly give me the use of your parlor for a little while, and a messenger to send for your son? For reasons, I do not wish to send my coachman."

"Certainly!" replied Mrs. Brewster, with surprise, smothered by politeness.

Twenty minutes later Charley entered her presence.

"You sent for me, Miss Goldthorp?" he said, seating himself near her in the depths of a bay-window.

"I did, Mr. Brewster. I know you to be a friend of Mr. Frederick Powell."

She blushed slightly, as she spoke. At mention of his friend's name Charley brightened with interest.

"I believe I may say that he has no truer, stancher friend than myself," replied the young man, with deep feeling.

"I am glad to hear you speak in that way, Mr. Brewster. It enables me more freely to make some painful disclosures, and to ask your assistance in aid of that friend."

"You may depend upon my hearty co-operation, Miss Goldthorp. I would do much to oblige you; for my friend I count nothing as a task."

"I wish first to ask you as to his general habits and the kind of associates he affects."

Charley hesitated. He did not know her motive, and he would not betray his friend.

"You need have no reserve with me, Mr. Brewster. I wish to clear Mr. Powell of imputations against him, not to build them up."

"I believe you, Miss Goldthorp. Frederick goes with the other young men about town, and is very much like them."

"Plays billiards, and drinks occasionally?"

"We all drink more or less."

There was something magnanimous in thus coupling himself with his friend, in what might be deemed reprehensible, that impressed Florence. She flashed a grateful look into his face, and went on:

"Mr. Brewster, did you ever see him under the influence of liquor—intoxicated?"

A deep scarlet suffused her face as she asked the question, and her eyes sought the floor.

"I have seen him twice when he was not himself."

"Only twice?"

She looked up eagerly.

"Only twice."

She laid a trembling hand on his arm.

"Mr. Brewster, are you so intimate with him that you would be apt to know if such a thing took place?" she asked, panting.

"We are almost constantly together. I think it could hardly take place without my knowledge."

"And the two instances with which you are familiar occurred?"

"One last night; the other three weeks since."

"Tell me all about them!"

Charley related the incidents as far as he was connected with them.

"Do you know anything about Frederick's movements, after you parted with him on the night three weeks ago?"

Charley reddened and looked undecided.

"Reserve nothing, Mr. Brewster. Nothing but the truth and the whole truth will do in this case. When telling what may seem most condemnatory, you may reveal some point on which everything else hinges."

"Miss Goldthorp, after leaving me, Frederick and Mr. Sanderson repaired to a gambling-den, kept by a man called Tiger Dick. There Frederick won a hundred dollars, before leaving."

"How did you learn this?"

"It was the common talk the next morning among our set. His being seen in such a place occasioned some surprise."

"Then he was not in the habit of gambling?"

"Never before, in that way, that I know of."

"In that way? What other way could he have gambled?"

"Some people call betting on horses and boat-races gambling."

"And he made such bets?"

"Never for more than the oysters, or, possibly, five or ten dollars."

"Has he gambled any within the last three weeks, that you know of?"

"I am almost sure that he has not."

"Mr. Brewster, do you think that Frederick's expenditures greatly exceed his salary?"

"Most assuredly not. I don't know that he saves much; but he is not more extravagant than other young men of his position in life."

"Who is this Mr. Sanderson?"

"Well," said Charley, with a puzzled smile, "he's Fred's evil genius. I don't know of a term which will exactly describe him; but he's a sort of nobody, that gains a kind of recognition among respectable fellows by his impudence and by the freedom with which he spends his money. He keeps Brown & Thurlow's books."

"You think that he has led Frederick into dissipation?"

"No doubt of it. I've tried to counteract his influence, and my interference has twice led to an open breach between Fred and myself."

"Do you think he could be approached by money? If it was to his interest to withhold a piece of information, could he be induced to reveal it by making it more to his interest to do so?"

"If he was sure that no one would find it out, I think he would accept a consideration. But he is a sort of shoddy gentleman, and would not sacrifice his caste for money."

"Mr. Brewster, I must see him."

"If you wish it, I will fetch him to you here."

"I should be much indebted to you."
"I shall have to introduce him to you in due form, Miss Goldthorp. As I said, he has dainty notions, and a slight to his vanity would make him as dumb as the Sphinx."

"It will not matter. I shall not stick at a mere form."

Billy Saunderson sat kicking his feet against the legs of his high stool, and congratulating himself for the hundredth time on the "windfall" that enabled him to extricate himself from the difficulty in which he had become involved, when Charley Brewster entered the store and said:

"Hallo, Saunderson! Busy?"

"Nary busy!"

"Will you walk down the street with me?"

"Traveling, or going somewhere?"

"Going somewhere."

"Lead on, me noble jukel!" cried the "decoy duck," leaping from the stool and putting on his coat.

"Put some bear's-grease on your hair, Billy. I'm going to take you to see a lady," said Charley, adopting a familiar tone to put him in good humor.

"Not!" cried Mr. Saunderson, in amazement. He was not used to being taken to see ladies by such fellows as Charley Brewster.

"Shine up your boots and come on," said Brewster, going toward the door.

"Gads!" cried the elated Saunderson, joining him on the sidewalk. "I haven't had a knock-down to one of the fair creatures for a week! I feel like a lamb led to the slaughter, blow me if I don't!"

The assurance of the fellow was insufferably offensive to Charley; and he replied, somewhat stiffly:

"The lady who sent me for you—"

"Sent you for me! She must be a duchess to command so gallant a messenger!"

"—Wishes to see you on business," concluded Charley, sharply, getting red in the face.

"O—oh!" exclaimed Mr. Saunderson, blankly; and his sudden collapse put Charley in good humor again.

"Mr. Saunderson," said Florence, when Charley had introduced him and left them alone together, "I understand that you are on terms of intimacy with Mr. Frederick Powell."

"I have that honor, madam," replied the "decoy," with what he conceived to be gentlemanly dignity.

"I am further informed that you were in his company when, three weeks ago to-morrow night, he visited the establishment of Tiger Dick."

A change, like a passing cloud, flitted across Billy Saunderson's face. The pupils of his eyes contracted, and he inclined his head slightly forward. His look and attitude seemed to say—"Ah!"

"Co-rect!" spoke his lips, dividing the word so as to make slang of it. For the moment, he was surprised out of his gentlemanly airs.

This change did not escape Florence.

"Mr. Saunderson," she said, "there are friends deeply interested in Mr. Powell, who wish to gain some information respecting him. If, with a hundred dollars, you could ascertain for us, to a certainty, whether or not Mr. Powell has either won or lost any money at Tiger Dick's place, before or since that night three weeks ago, you would lay us all under great obligations to you."

She drew from her purse a bill which she had that morning received, with which to purchase a shawl, and extended it to him invitingly; but he declined it with a wave of his hand. These are the thoughts that passed through his mind:

"Oh, no! Not any for Joe, you bet! He never pols a split ticket, Joe don't! He takes his p'ison straight, or lets it alone. The Tiger didn't give me a hundred dollars for nothing, and my lady fair wouldn't give me a hundred dollars for nothing. I'm afraid I stuck my finger into a mighty hot pie (if it *was* the means of getting me out of a deuced nasty scrape) when I agreed to crib that key. But I've got to fight it out on that line. If I straddle this blind, they'll go to seesawing across me, and cut me in two, sure! The Tiger evidently wanted to 'give the dog a bad name.' Hence my cue."

He said aloud:

"You are welcome, madam, to any information I can give you; but I could put the money to no use in furthering your ends. I seldom frequent such places myself, and am consequently unable to speak with certainty respecting Mr. Powell. But as we were passing out, some one chaffed the Tiger about Fred's success; and I heard him reply: 'Oh, that's nothing. He has flung away more money than that here, many a time.' From this I should infer that Mr. Powell had chipped in there before; though I can say nothing of my own knowledge."

That was all Florence could get out of the "decoy duck." He met her at every turn, artfully blackening Frederick's character by indirection, though bringing no open charge. When he set about it, Billy was no mean dissembler; but the eyes of love detected the insincerity that pervaded everything he said. And when he was gone, and Florence repeated it all to Charley, he said:

"Lies, from beginning to end, depend upon it. I know that Fred was not in the habit of visiting such places. And as for his losing large sums of money, it is simply absurd."

"Mr. Brewster, I cannot express to you how gratifying it is to me to hear you speak with such positiveness. I will now tell you why I have been seeking this information."

She then related the charges against Fred, detailing at length the evidence and ascribed motive, concluding with:

"With the establishment of the fact that Frederick has not lost or squandered large sums of money, the whole thing falls to the ground. Take away the incentive, and you knock out the keystone. Everything points the same way. Frederick Powell never made those copies of his father's signature. If he did, it was not for a fraudulent purpose. Depend upon it, Cecil Beaumont is in some way at the bottom of this!"

"Oh! I beg your pardon if I interrupt you. I heard voices, and thought it Mrs. Brewster and Clara."

Florence and Charley started and looked up. There on the threshold stood May Powell, a deep crimson on her cheek, and a look of surprise and questioning in her eyes. The doors being open to admit the air, she had entered unheard.

Charley arose and advanced to receive her. She

nodded, half formally, half familiarly, to Florence, and said to Charley:

"Is your sister at home?"

"She is out in the garden, with mother," he replied.

"Very well. I will go to her."

And while he returned to Florence, she followed the most circuitous paths of the garden, for time to regain her composure, with these words ringing in her ears:

"Frederick Powell never made the copies of his father's signature. If he did, it was not for a fraudulent purpose. Depend upon it, Cecil Beaumont is in some way at the bottom of this!"

"I wonder if she heard me," said Florence, as Charley regained his seat.

"I think probably she did, though doubtless so disconnectedly as to make nothing of what you said. But I was about to suggest these objections which will inevitably be raised against your theory. First, Mr. Beaumont, in the eyes of the community, at least, is an upright and in every way trustworthy man. Second, he is a friend of Mr. Powell's family, and has nothing to gain by ruining his son. In the absence of assignable motive, his position seems unassailable."

"But he quarreled with Frederick."

"Yet you must admit that Frederick was almost wholly in the wrong, and that Mr. Beaumont conducted himself like a gentleman."

Florence crimsoned from two causes—first at this view of her lover's conduct, coming from an impartial witness and his nearest friend; and, second, at what she was about to utter.

"Mr. Brewster," she said, "there is nothing so unreliable as outside appearances. But let that pass. I know that you are a man of honor; and circumstances justify the revelation I am now about to make. This is Cecil Beaumont's motive for ruining Frederick Powell: On the day before Frederick's fatal visit to Tiger Dick's den, Cecil Beaumont made me a proposal of marriage. Upon my rejection of his suit, he flew into such a rage as no good man ever succumbs to. He referred to Frederick as his rival; and, not in words, but in looks and tones, displayed the whole malignity of his nature. The world might say that my vanity exaggerated the importance which he attached to his disappointment; but in that momentary dropping of the veil, I saw a hatred that nothing but annihilation can satisfy. Again, in the look which he gave me after the quarrel at Dead Man's Bluff I recognized Frederick's mortal enemy."

During this recital, Charley Brewster was fidgeting with excitement, but did not interrupt her. When she concluded, he said:

"Miss Goldthorp, do you mean to say that Cecil Beaumont has proposed marriage to you within three weeks?"

"Three weeks ago, this afternoon. Two or three days afterward he came to me for a reconciliation of friendship, with such a specious story of suffering and remorse, that I forgave him. But the look of yesterday undeceived me. I know that an implacable hatred does exist."

Charley Brewster was crimson with indignation, and his eyes flashed ominously as he said:

"Miss Goldthorp, your last words have revealed to me the true character of the man. I had long suspected an engagement to exist between Mr. Beaumont and Miss Powell. On the day subsequent to the one of which you have just spoken, I was a forced listener to her jealous arraignment of him. She had put together your agitation on your return to the house, and his sudden disappearance, and was making herself miserable over them. He treated her jealousy as absurd, and reassured her completely. The man who can be guilty of such perfidy as he has manifested is capable of even greater crimes than the one which you impute to him. Miss Goldthorp, I renew my alliance with you. If friendship for Frederick left any lack of incentive, it is now fully supplied. Miss Powell must and shall be saved from the villainy of this man!"

He extended his hand; and as Florence placed hers within it in solemn compact, she saw in his eyes such a love for May Powell as she herself felt for Fred.

CHAPTER XVI.

A DELICATE SITUATION.

MAY POWELL went home in a very perturbed state of mind.

"What *did* she mean?" she kept asking herself, "by Fred's not copying papa's signature for a fraudulent purpose; and what has Cecil to do with it?"

Thinking of copied signatures, that scene three weeks ago recurred to her mind, with Cecil leaping from beneath her touch, and turning upon her with such a frightened look. He certainly seemed frightened; and why should he be copying her father's signature? She had not thought of it before; but it certainly was strange. And then a vague terror seized May, an incomprehensible shiver ran through her frame.

Her father was not yet returned from the bank; but she found Mr. Carrington in the library reading a newspaper. May was a privileged character with her grandfather; so she ran in, drew an ottoman and sat down at his feet, and, with an arm resting upon his knees, waited for him to give her his attention.

Mr. Carrington looked at her over his spectacles with an affectionate smile, and seeing that she had something to say, laid aside his paper and spectacles, and put his hand on her sunny head with a fond touch.

"How different from the other," he mused, "and yet just as lovely. One dark, the other fair—they would have made rare sisters."

And a half-sigh passed his lips.

"Grandpa," began May, "you have not been generous toward me."

"In what respect, my daughter?" asked her relative.

"You are keeping back from me what I have a right to know with the rest of you."

There was a hurt tremor in her voice and moisture in her eyes.

"It is sometimes a kindness to those we love to leave them in ignorance," said the old man, feelingly.

"It is cruelty in this case. I know too much to long remain in the dark; the suspense, with its vague forebodings, is torture."

"How much do you know, my pet?"

"I know that you are all in trouble, and on Fred's account. I am his sister, and have a right to know what affects him so materially."

"You know nothing of the nature of the trouble?"

"Yes. I know how he was brought home three weeks ago, and what he had been doing that night. She hid her face on his arm, with a deep flush of shame."

"You know what he had been doing. How did you learn?" asked her grandfather, in surprise.

"Never mind. It is enough that I know," she replied, evasively. Something warned her not to implicate Cecil. "But that is not all. There is something else."

Mr. Carrington hesitated in troubled thought. How could he tell her that her brother was a forger, a common thief—worst of all, the plunderer of his own father?

"Grandpa," she urged, "it cannot be kept from me always, and I have a right to know."

"My child," said the old man, gravely, "you impose upon me a cruel task. But, as you say, it would be unjust, as well as impossible, to keep you in ignorance of the sad calamity that has fallen upon us all; and I feel that it would be better for you to hear the truth from our lips than to gather it by indiscretion and in fragments, distorted by ignorance and prejudice."

With that beginning, he told her all, as gently as so melancholy a recital could be told.

May sat through it all, white and trembling, without a word, without a tear. And all the time there rung in her ears, like the utterances of some dread oracle, the words:

"Frederick Powell never made those copies of his father's signature. If he did, it was not for a fraudulent purpose. Depend upon it, Cecil Beaumont is in some way at the bottom of this!"

And one picture, like a conjuration of the same power, floated ever before her vision. It was that of a man, who leaped to his feet with a cry of terror; and then, as he recognized her, and a sickly smile played over his white face, he slid some papers into his desk—one a letter in her father's handwriting, the other a sheet with copies of the signature—and said:

"Oh! is it you, May? How you startled me. I couldn't imagine what it was."

An icy shiver ran through her frame. Cowering, shrinking, as from some dread monster whose hot breath seared and blistered her heart, May Powell stopped her ears and hid her face in her grandfather's breast. But she could not escape. It peered at her through the shadows; its mocking eyes burned into her soul from behind some half-drawn curtain; and its hollow voice echoed and re-echoed in her ears that startled cry.

The old man smoothed her golden hair, and kissed it with a father's compassion and tenderness.

"One more!" he murmured, sadly. "Ah! if we only knew how many hearts we should cause to bleed, how often would we hesitate before we act!"

May arose and drew herself from his arms with a shudder.

"Do not mind me, grandpa," she said. "I want to be alone."

Out of the house, and down the garden paths to a shady nook on the river-bank, she ran, and dipped her hands in the cool water, and pressed them to her throbbing temples and tried to think.

To one sentence of Mr. Carrington's she clung as to an only hope.

"Throughout all this painful affair, Mr. Beaumont has conducted himself with the consideration and delicacy of a true friend and perfect gentleman."

She repeated it over and over again to herself; she pleadingly held it up before the demon that haunted her; and suddenly she evolved from it a thought that caused her to utter an exclamation of surprise, and then stand trembling, breathless, striving to keep the idea before her mind.

"He could not!" she suddenly exclaimed aloud. "He is Fred's friend; he loves me. There is nothing to gain. There is no motive!"

But then came that startled cry, as if hallowed within her very brain, followed by the single word, "Why?" Reeling, as from a blow, she sunk to the ground, her head bowed in her lap, her mind again in a whirl.

Cecil Beaumont was just preparing to leave the bank when a note was placed in his hand. Opening it, he read:

"Come to me at the Honeysuckle Bower to-night."

"MAY."

"Humph!" he muttered, turning it over and examining it. "What does this mean? If I am to meet her at the bower, it is evident that I am *not* to meet her at the house. But why? And why is it not addressed?"

As the above is all that there was on the sheet, and the envelope bore the simple superscription, "Mr. Cecil Beaumont," he seemed little likely to get any enlightenment from external evidences; and thrusting it into his pocket, he went to supper.

The more he thought it over, the more there seemed something unusual about it; and he drew near the bower, just as the twilight was deepening, with a pretty lively curiosity, not untinted with vague misgivings. He found May in waiting, and immediately stepped to her side and took her hand.

"May, my love," he said, "this is a sad meeting for you and me."

He would have put his arm about her waist, but she turned away and said, hastily:

"Wait a moment, Mr. Beaumont!"

"Mr. Beaumont!" he repeated, in reproachful amazement.

She was shaken by a storm of emotion. She covered her averted face with the hand that was free, and struggled hard with her feelings.

"Why, May, what is the matter with you? What does this mean? Come, come, my darling, what has happened to you?"

And again he would have encircled her with his arm; but she sprung away with a sobbing cry.

"Wait! wait. I wish to ask you some questions."

He stopped. His fingers relaxed and let her hand slip from his grasp. Then he stood looking at her in silent reproach and surprise.

At that, a great wave of love and remorse swept

every other consideration before it; and she threw herself into his arms, weeping hysterically.

"Oh, Cecil! forgive me; but why—why were you copying papa's signature that day three weeks ago? I have told nobody; but what did you do with the paper?"

He took her arms from about his neck; then sunk down into the rustic seat from very weakness, and covered his face with his hands, chilled to the soul with icy terror.

"Cecil! Cecil! you do not answer me!" she cried, her face deathly pale, her eyes dilating with a nameless horror.

Cecil Beaumont saw the naked sword above him, suspended by a single thread. A breath, a whisper, and he would be annihilated! He struggled to throw off the incubus that bound his limbs. He could not move. He strove to speak. Terror chained his tongue.

"Speak! speak!" she aspirated in a husky whisper. "Are you guilty?"

Guilty! The word pierced his soul like a trenchant sword. It brought before his vision a restless sea of upturned faces, with surprise and horror expressed in some, in some malicious satisfaction, and cold condemnation and hatred in all; himself the cynosure of all eyes, and over opposite, the judge, pronouncing the sentence that doomed him to chains. Then came a cry in approbation of the just decree—a cry of triumph and scorn that chilled him to the soul. But, amid the din of voices, the words, "I have told nobody," recurred to his mind; and clutching at the hope that lay in them, he chained his terror beneath an iron will, and struggling back to self-possession, said:

"Yes! I am guilty!"

An indescribable cry of amazement and horror issued from her lips, and she sprang back, cowering among the shadows.

"But not in that way!—not in that way, I swear to you, May!" he cried, starting to his feet. "Do you believe me capable of dealing him such a blow?—him, your brother! Do you believe that I could so crush you through him? Oh, how little you know of my love if you do!"

"I do not! I do not!" she cried, again throwing herself into his arms. "Oh, forgive me, Cecil, if I have wronged you by a thought."

Gently he again drew her arms from about his neck.

"Wait," he said. "You must hear all; and then, if you can forgive me—if you can still love me—"

"I do forgive you; I do love you. I know that you have not sinned—"

"Wait, May. I have sinned. I humble myself before you, and confess all. But this is no place for explanation. Let us take a boat and go out on the river, where we may converse without danger of being overheard."

When they were on the water, out of earshot from the shore, he went on:

"I do not try to extenuate the sin of which I have been guilty. I confess it in all its enormity. The events of to-day have brought it home to me with greater force than I ever felt it before. May, like most men, I have been ambitious of acquiring wealth. But, believe me, when I say that it was chiefly on your account. I desired that when you came to me, I might be able to surround you with those comforts and luxuries to which you were born."

Tears ran down May's cheeks as she listened. Cecil Beaumont noted them with a grim internal smile.

"To secure this, I was tempted to engage in speculation. There was a 'corner' on grain in Chicago; and I saw ten thousand dollars slipping from my grasp, for the want of one thousand to hold it for a week or two. So my agents telegraphed me, and so I believed. Then it was that I was tempted to use money that did not belong to me. I argued that I could repay it in two or three weeks, at most, and no one would be injured. Our drafts may be signed by the cashier or president. I dared not sign it in my own name; the chances of detection were too great. Then I conceived the plan of using your father's name—of committing a deliberate forgery. I do not spare myself. That is the plain designation of my crime. While learning to imitate your father's signature you discovered me—and saved me! Yes, May, you saved me. I got to thinking about your purity and goodness, and how unworthy of you I should be, with my life stained with crime. Then I saw that the gain of no amount of money would repay the loss of an approving conscience. That night I burned the evidences of my sin, and made a covenant with my God never to yield to a like temptation. My affairs were not so bad as at first supposed; and only about one-third of the money was lost. I then saw that I had been about to burden myself with a lifelong stigma, to secure a little more than three thousand dollars."

"But my sin was punished in an unexpected way. It was when burning the evidences of my own guilt that I found the half-burnt papers which condemned your brother. I did not know who had written them at the time; but resolved to find out and warn him. May, it was my guilty conscience that held me inactive. It seemed as if, should I broach the subject, accusers would rise against me on every side. I held my peace; and ultimately found myself the instrument of convicting of the very crime of which I had so nearly been guilty, the brother of the woman to whom I had dedicated my life. I cannot tell you the agony I have suffered to-day over the thought that had I spoken then, I might have saved him. May, this is what you have to forgive; the crime of which I was guilty in my heart, and the cowardice that held me back when I might have saved your brother."

May was not versed enough in business details to detect the speciousness of this story. She saw her lover humbling himself before her, confessing a crime in thought, instigated by love for herself, and taking blame to himself for not preventing a crime of which he knew nothing at the time of its commission.

"Cecil," she said, "I do not lose sight of your real fault; but I see also the noble motives that enabled you to withstand the temptation. I love you more than ever, because I know that you have been tempted and proved strong. As for the melancholy case of my brother, you did not know the evil intent that lay

in the copies, and are not responsible for what followed."

"And you can forgive me, May? You will still love and trust me?"

He took her hand; and as he bent over it, she felt a tear fall upon it with his kisses. Ah! an arch hypocrite was Cecil Beaumont!

"Cecil," said May, with tears of gratitude and happiness in her eyes, "our days shall be all the brighter by contrast with the night through which we have just passed."

CHAPTER XVII.

A DARK NIGHT'S WORK.

FLORENCE GOLDTHROP went home with a feeling of burning impatience for the coming of evening, when she should meet her lover. She longed to tell him what she had been doing, and believed that his own story would throw more light on what she already knew.

The sun had scarcely dipped below the horizon when she ran and stationed herself in the arbor, to await the approach of night. The moments dragged slowly; but she whiled them with bright anticipations of her lover's ultimate triumph, and of joy at her instrumentality in his reinstatement.

So the twilight deepened and night fell; but it did not bring the expected lover.

Florence went out on to the garden path and listened, but not a sound rewarded her. She looked up at the slowly, silently drifting clouds, that were blotting out the stars, one by one, and a feeling of vague misgiving crept into her breast.

And still she waited; and still he came not.

Urged by anxiety, she went to where the river washed the base of the garden, and stood there in the silence and gloom, and waited for a lover that did not come. She strained her eyes, and saw nothing but shadows. She listened, and heard only the rippling water and the breathing wind.

A puff of wind came down the stream, fretting its surface into wavelets, and touching her cheek with a sudden chill. It was the precursor of the rising storm.

The chill crept into her spirits, and to her excited fancy seemed like a voice from the grave; while the wind in the tree-tops resolved itself into piteous sighs, and (its waves breaking on the shore) the river seemed to sob, as it flowed along.

Panting and pale with apprehension, she hastened from the desolate spot, and, with her heart in her mouth, came across the garden.

"Stebbins," she asked, "didn't some one pass the house on foot a little while ago—did you notice?"

"Not that I knows on, Miss Florence," replied the man. "I hain't seen nobody pass afoot, barrin' and exceptin' young Meester Powell, who made the gate jest afore you come home, and then cut 'cross lots toward Dead Man's Bluff."

"But you heard no one just a few minutes ago—since dark?" pursued Florence, resorting to a woman's subterfuge, to cover the fact of her having sought just the information his words had given.

"No, ma'am—nobody," replied the man, innocently.

And, with a remark about the approaching storm, she passed on into the house.

It came with the incessant gleam of lightning, deafening crash of thunder, and wild fury of wind and rain peculiar to the Western prairie country. And Florence Goldthorp started from her sleep and sat upright in bed, with blanched face and cold hands, listening for a repetition of the despairing cry that had broken so vividly upon her dreams.

It was a foolish fancy; but having wept herself to sleep, with her mind full of anxiety for her unfortunate lover, he had appeared to her in her dreams, with his face gleaming white amid the dark waves of the storm-lashed river, and his despairing cry ringing wildly above the bellowing thunder and howling wind. So vivid had been her dream, that, cowering amid the bedclothes, she vainly sought to rid herself of the ghastly spectacle, and the breaking light of morning found her wan and exhausted with her terrible vigil.

With the devil of his nature hid beneath a lying exterior, Cecil Beaumont took his leave of May, and, with her pure kisses on his lips, went to Dead Man's Bluff to meditate on the tangled web of crime that bound so many hearts in its baleful meshes, little dreaming the new phase it was destined to assume before to-morrow's sun.

Left alone, May sought the house and her couch. Like Florence, for a long time she wooed slumber in vain, and when at last she slept, her rest was distracted by the excitements of the day.

She, too, started from sleep with a great terror upon her. But to her had appeared the form of her brother, not surrounded by weeds and foam and buffeted by angry waves, but bowed beneath a load of shame and remorse, with the badge of a felon on his wrists. And near him stood another loved form, writhing beneath a hidden shame that gnawed his heart, as his lips gave the testimony that condemned the other to a dungeon.

"Oh, Fred! Oh, Cecil!" she murmured, with clasped hands and tear-dimmed eyes. But the lightning gleamed in the murky sky, the thunder crashed and reverberated, and the wind and rain dashed against the window-pane, as if in angry protest at the mention of those names.

And Dead Man's Bluff! Ah! how well it was named!

As the sun fell below the horizon, the ill-omened crow alighted on the dead limb of a gnarled old oak. With the gathering shades, the ghoul-like bats emerged from their hiding-places and flapped on noiseless wing through its gloomy aisles; and, again and again, like the breaking of a knell, the owl woke its dismal echoes with his hateful note.

But other sounds are there that awe into silence the wonted voices of the wood. Voices, raised in angry altercation, tell of storms of human passion, not less wild than that which is now brooding on the face of nature. Then cruel blows, and desperate struggling that crushes the tender plants, rends up the turf, and tears the vines from their clinging hold. Then deathlike stillness—a plunge in the dark waters—a voice rising wildly out of the shadows—above the moaning and sighing of the wind—a voice crying: "Cecil! Cecil!"—a form fleeing madly from the spot,

bareheaded, with ghastly face, horror-distended eyes and chattering teeth! Then the wild rush of wind, the blinding fury of rain, the lurid gleam of lightning, and the deafening, earth-rocking detonations of thunder—God's and nature's condemnation of the awful deed!

CHAPTER XVIII.

A MISSING MAN.

THE morning sun mounted a clear, unclouded sky. It seemed impossible that wild confusion could have reigned so recently, where all was now peace and tranquillity. A limb here and there torn from its parent trunk, and the ruts worn by running water in the road, were all that reminded one of the late struggle, while the smiling freshness of vegetation and the balminess of the air seemed to belie the chaotic confusion in which they had their birth.

But peace was not destined to come to the bosoms yesterday so sorely lacerated by shame and grief. Mr. Powell sat at his desk, haunted by a vague anxiety at the non-appearance of his cashier, though the morning was already far advanced. Inquiry brought to light the fact that he had not slept at his boarding-place, nor appeared at breakfast. Neither had he passed the night at the bank.

As the hours slipped by, the knowledge of his disappearance spread beyond the bank; and by noon an undercurrent of excitement pervaded the city, and the affair was in the hands of the police.

"What is the matter, papa?" asked May Powell, struck with the troubled look on her father's face.

"Mr. Beaumont has not made his appearance at the bank to-day, and I am feeling a little anxious about him."

"Has anything happened to him, papa?"

She paled with quick apprehension, yet she strove not to let her agitation appear in her voice. Her father, who was not looking at her, did not detect the slight tremor. He answered:

"No, my dear, I hope not."

"And when was he last seen?"

"Last night, just before dark, he was seen to get into a boat."

"And he did not return to his boarding-place?"

"No, he did not sleep there, nor at the bank."

"Papa, I was at the Honeysuckle Bower as he passed, and he stopped and talked with me a while."

Mr. Powell looked up, and saw his daughter pale as death, and in her eyes the awakening of an awful fear.

"Why, May—why, my daughter!" he said, taking her cold hands in his, "do not be frightened. It may be nothing after all. When did he leave you, and which way did he go?"

"Papa, it was after dark when he went away, and he rowed toward Dead Man's Bluff!"

The ill-omened name, as well as her looks and tones, struck a chill of sympathetic dread to her father's heart.

"This must be communicated to the police," he said; and rising, he called Charley Brewster into his private room.

The heart of the secret lover was thrilled by the white face of her who inspired his passion; and to afford her what little assurance was possible he said:

"Mr. Powell, I will attend to this matter myself, and bring you the earliest tidings."

May gave him a gratified look, and then he was gone.

Accompanied by the chief of police and the little detective, he put out on the river and rowed to Dead Man's Bluff. Something wedged in among the stones caught the ferret eyes of the detective, and he said to his superior:

"Mr. Prescott, there seems to be something worth looking into."

The boat was directed to the shore; and as its prow grated in the gravel, Charley Brewster leaped out and lifted what proved to be a hat, battered by the waves and foul with sand and foam and clay-dyed water. With an awful solemnity upon him, as if he stood in the presence of the dead, he said:

"It is Cecil's—Mr. Beaumont's!"

Mr. Smith, the detective, silently examined it, and then passed it to his superior.

"He may have been caught in the storm and capsized," suggested the chief of police.

"But the boat?" said Charley.

"That would be carried down the river and swept into the Mississippi."

"This is scarcely conclusive evidence of the man's death," said the detective, in a deliberate tone. "It may have blown from his head, beyond convenient recovery."

For a moment, Charley breathed more freely; but then he suggested:

"His disappearance?"

"True. Taken in connection with that, I admit its force as subsidiary evidence. But it is improbable that a skiff should be capsized in so narrow a stream as this, merely by the force of a storm. Let us examine the bank for signs of his having gone ashore."

Their search was fruitless. If Cecil had left the boat, he must have done so at the landing some distance below where his hat was found. He could not have ascended the bank at any place between there and the bluff without leaving marks in the clay.

Before any further steps could be taken, a lumber-wagon was brought to a standstill in the road on the other side of the river, and a gruff hail came across the water.

"I say, strangers!"

Our friends looked up, and saw a countryman sitting in his wagon, balancing a long ox-goad in his hand.

"Well?" called back the chief of police, interrogatively.

"Be you a-lookin' fur a man what's missin'? I've jest been up to the city, an' heard tell that some bank feller hain't come to chalk to-day, an' there's some that's afeard he's been drowned, ur somethin' ur other."

"That's the man we're looking for," replied the officer with directness. "Can you give us any light on the subject?"

"Wal, I thort I mout as well tell yer that, ez I was a-goin' home last night, I heard some mighty tall swearin' on that there bluff. But in course you know it ain't a very uncommon thing to hear a man swear in this part of the country; an' ez I'm a peaceable man myself, an' the storm war a-comin' up right smart, I kep' right along, a-mindin' of my own business, an' didn't stop to hear what it war all

about. Only when I heard tell this afternoon that somebody was missin', the thought struck me that maybe some onlucky chap had got cracked on the head, and perhaps pitched inter the drink."

The boat was rowed across the river, and the farmer rigidly cross-examined, but with no further results. Then the officers returned to follow up the new clew.

"Had he money about him?" asked Mr. Prescott of Charley, as they advanced.

"He may have had twenty or thirty dollars, or more," was the reply. "He usually carried a pretty well-filled pocketbook."

"And here are signs of a struggle!" suddenly exclaimed the sharp-eyed detective.

Sure enough, the grass was trampled over quite a space. And near the center was a dark stain, not wholly washed out by the rain, from which Charley turned away with a shudder. Near by was found a cudgel; and to the knotted end still clung a bit of mangled flesh.

With this ghastly evidence of violence, they set out on their return to the city. Charley was set down at Mr. Powell's, and went slowly, reluctantly, to the house. He found the banker worn and weary with the suffering through which he had passed, and at his side May, pale with new anxiety.

"Where is he, Mr. Brewster? Have you seen him?" she asked, devouring his face with her eyes.

He cast about in his mind for some way to prepare her for the blow, and to gain time, answered simply:

"No."

But she saw the white horror that still clung to his face, and with a fascinating intensity of gaze that constrained a reply, said, in a hushed whisper:

"Is he dead?"

Her eyes held him so that he could not escape; and with his heart wrung at the cruel blow he must inflict, he stammered:

"I fear—that he has met with an accident—or violence!"

She took a step forward, groped blindly with her hands, reeled and would have fallen, but he sprang forward and caught her in his arms.

In that awful moment, while he held her lifeless form in his embrace, a thought flashed through his brain, pervading his utmost recesses like a gleam of lightning in a dark night—the thought:

"He is dead! What now stands between us?"

And he clasped her to his heart with a wild fervency—a maddening hope.

But the next moment he hated himself for the thought, and laid her on the sofa with a sort of reverent awe. Then he stepped back with a feeling that his very vicinity, after such a thought, were pollution.

"My child! Oh, what has happened to her?" cried the father, springing to her side.

Charley's first impulse was to tell him of her engagement to Cecil; but then he thought that if she had seen fit to withhold the knowledge of it from her father, it was her secret; and he only said:

"She is unnerved by the incidents of yesterday, and this announcement has overcome her."

Then he pulled the bell-rope, and restoratives were soon administered, and brought her back to life and suffering.

Her father hovered about her with a tenderness more than womanly; but she turned away her face, and moaned and wailed with an abandon that racked his sore heart with new anguish.

CHAPTER XIX. THE ARREST.

THE news of the murder of Cecil Beaumont spread through the city like wildfire; and before the expiration of an hour scores were hurrying to the scene of the tragedy, urged by that morbid curiosity which feeds on sensation and excitement. Every scrap of information was seized upon and devoured with ravenous avidity, and the wildest conjectures were bandied to and fro as to the perpetrator and motive of the crime.

When this was exhausted, they wandered aimlessly about the bluff, or sat and watched the boats moving slowly to and fro over the water, dragging for the body.

Meanwhile the officers of the law in town had not been idle; and two haugdog-looking villains were arrested on suspicion, from the fact of their having been unusually "flush" with money on the night before, with no visible means for its honest acquisition; and despite the clamorous protestations of themselves and kindred spirits, they were lodged in jail to await examination.

Out on the bluff, a loud hallo drew the attention of the loungers to some new item of interest. A hat had been found among the bushes further up on the bluff; and near it was a spot bearing evidences of having been the scene of another struggle. Here evidently had taken place the first contest. The combatants had neared the precipice, until one had fallen over the verge, catching at the bushes and tearing them from their hold in his descent. He had evidently been arrested on a ledge, and passed along it, to be met by his adversary from above and renew the conflict on the spot first discovered.

This interpretation of the signs lent an aspect of malignant persistency to the murder, that wrought the feeling of resentment toward the murderer to the highest pitch; and the excited throng vented their rage in groans of condemnation, as the hat of the supposed wretch was borne along.

The hat was taken in charge by the proper officers, and carried to town for identification. As they neared the police headquarters another crowd came down the street from the opposite direction, bearing in their midst a young man whose white face and wild eyes attested the terror under which he was laboring. It appeared that he was a lad of not over-brilliant wit; that he was in the habit of fishing with set-lines in Dead Man's Hole; and that while going to remove his lines before the storm he had heard a voice calling: "Cecil! Cecil!" and shortly afterward a man, bare-headed and evidently in terror, had rushed by him, so near that he caught a full view of his face in the moonlight, before the gathering storm had wholly obscured it. His clouded mind had not given due importance to the circumstance; and his knowledge was only discovered by accident that afternoon.

"Hey, here, hey!" yelled a burly Hibernian, elbowing his way through the crowd. "Bring him

along and let him see the b'yes, if it was arry one o' them he was afther seein' lasht noight! Bad luck to the spalpeens that 'u'd dhrag two honest b'yes into a shkrappe loike this!"

The fisherman was confronted with the incarcerated ruffians, and declared them the antipodes of the man who had fled past him in the night, who had the appearance of a gentleman. By the influence of an alderman and two or three ward politicians, who were skilled manipulators of the "repeaters," the way was cleared to give the "honest b'yes" an immediate examination; and as it was found that they had only fuddled a countryman with bad whisky and "sharped" him out of his money, they were dismissed, to add fuel to the flame that was destined soon to burst forth in their unreasoning quest of some one upon whom to revenge the indignity of their arrest.

"Hurroo! hurroo!" yelled their irrepressible defender. "Death to the kid-gloved gents that 'u'd throy to saddle their misdeeds on two as honest b'yes as iver shook leg at a wake, or dhropped a spalpeen wid a shillelah!"

The crowd cheered approval, and the "honest b'yes" were borne off in triumph.

Meanwhile scores of people examined the hat supposed to belong to the murderer. One by one they turned away, until Charley Brewster took it into his hand. Then there was a change. He grew pale and his hand trembled visibly.

"Mr. Brewster, do you recognize the hat?" asked a voice at his side; and he turned to see Mr. Prescott, with the detective, John Smith, at his elbow. The eyes of the latter were fixed upon Charley's face with an unwavering gaze.

"No, no, it cannot be!" replied Charley.

Then his fingers turned down the leather that ran round the inside of the hat. Behind it was a letter, folded into a strip and inserted so as to make the hat fit closer to the head. Charley did not have to unfold it to learn that it was addressed:

"My Dear Fred."

Involuntarily he pushed the leather back into its place, and laid the hat on the table, with a face paler than ever.

"Excuse me, Mr. Brewster," said the detective, in a quiet tone, "but you do seem familiar with the hat. To whom does it belong?"

Charley answered only two words:

"Frederick Powell!"

An exclamation of surprise ran through the crowd at this announcement, followed by a deeper one of angry condemnation.

"What?" cried one, "him as robbed his own father, only night before last?"

Charley started, and looked inquiringly at the chief of police.

"Folks will have their say, sir," said Mr. Prescott; "and Mr. Powell's apathy certainly has an ugly look about it—when there's scarcely a doubt but the Tiger and his crew were the men."

"And what is to be done with Tiger Dick?"

"If Pat Croghan don't get worse, he'll probably be out of jail to-morrow."

Five minutes later the officers were on their way to apprehend Frederick Powell for the murder of Cecil Beaumont.

Meanwhile Florence Goldthorp passed the morning in agonizing suspense, waiting for some sign of her lover. At noon the report of Cecil's disappearance reached her and cast a chill over her heart. Then came the news of the dreadful discovery at Dead Man's Bluff.

Florence felt her heart stand still, when told that they were dragging the river for the body, and that there were evidences of foul play. She believed in the villainy of Cecil; she knew the sense of injury under which Fred smarted; and she asked herself:

"What if they met last night?"

The suspense became unbearable; and she ordered the carriage, and set out alone for the city. As she neared the business center a wild tumult gradually swelled on the air. The barking of dogs, the rush of hurrying feet, and the hoarse cries of excited men, blended in hideous uproar! Nearer and nearer it drew, increasing at every moment. She could see frightened horses rearing and plunging in the cross street down which it was proceeding.

Suddenly a man, bareheaded and countless, burst round the corner, and almost at his heels a mob of excited, halloing pursuers. One look at the white face and streaming hair, and her heart stood still and everything seemed whirling round. The next moment she fought back the vertigo that had seized her, and, grasping the reins, turned her horse round and drove to the curbstone. Standing upright in the carriage, she waved her scarf and cried: "Fred! Fred!" with frantic energy.

His eye caught the scarf; he heard her voice; he recognized her; he turned, leaped into the carriage, and fell almost lifeless at her feet.

She struck her horse with the whip; but he only reared back on his haunches, cramped the carriage so as to nearly overturn it, plunged vainly to free himself, and then stood quivering in every muscle. A strong hand was on the bit, and the voice of a master commanded, "Whoo!"

Florence saw the fruitlessness of her efforts; and, stooping down, she took her lover's head in her arms, and turned a white face toward the advancing mob, as if in defiance.

Fred saw her failure, and tearing himself from her arms, leaped to the ground, for one more desperate effort. But he was surrounded on every side, and escape was impossible. With a blind instinct of resistance, he fought, knocking his assailants right and left; but a blow from behind felled him stunned and bleeding to the ground.

Florence sprang from the carriage, and would have gone to him even there; but a strong hand detained her and led her back.

Then Charley Brewster came elbowing his way through the crowd to her side.

"This is no place for you, Miss Goldthorp," he said, taking charge of her, and almost lifting her into the carriage. And, almost fainting, she submitted, while poor Fred was carried off insensible, followed by a hooting and wildly gesticulating mob.

"That's him! that's him!" cried the fisherman, as the insensible Fred was borne into the station-house.

"Whoo!" yelled the reloutable defender of "honest b'yes." "Down wid the patent-leadtter gentleman that 'u'd let a couple o' lads hang,

that niver did the blaggard the world's bit o' har-rum."

And amid yells and imprecations, Fred Powell was thrust into a cell, with a medical attendant to restore him to consciousness, while the police exerted themselves to disperse the howling mob that filled the street.

CHAPTER XX. BOLTS AND BARS.

NOT in his carriage, but on foot—for it seemed as if he could not go on in the enjoyment of comforts, while the cruel bars shut his wretched son from the sunshine and free air of heaven—Mr. Powell passed along with slow step and bowed head. Where yesterday he would have been greeted with cordiality and deference, to-day he was passed by with coldness and silence; and men who yesterday would have doffed their hats in servile adulation, to-day stared with scarce-concealed contempt. With the lines deepened on his care-worn brow, and the threads of silver multiplied in his hair, he challenged their pity, not hatred.

Into the great stone jail and along the echoing corridor he passed; then the keys clanked, the bolts shot back with a harsh grating sound, the iron door creaked on its hinges, and he stood in the cell, whose chained and padlocked air struck a chill to his soul. In a corner, on an iron bed, was stretched the form of a man on his face, motionless as if dead. With a strange thrill he laid a hand upon his shoulder, and said:

"My son!"

The man never moved, nor uttered a sound; but his form thrilled beneath that touch, as with an electric shock.

Again the father spoke:

"Frederick, my poor, lost boy, what have you done?"

There were tears in his eyes and a sob in his voice. His emotion communicated itself to the prostrate man, and a moan escaped his lips.

"Frederick, we have not ceased to love you. I love you, your sister loves you, still. But, oh, you have wrung our hearts! Why—why did you do this last rash act?"

The young man writhed beneath the words of the older man. He turned over; and raising himself on his elbow, displayed his haggard face and bloodshot eyes.

"He had blasted my life; he had made me an out-cast, by his hellish plots and duplicity—it is true, though I do not expect you to believe it. I did not mean to kill him; but now that he is dead, I have no regrets."

"Hush! hush, my son!" said the father. "Your bitter words only add to the weight of misery that oppresses my heart. I did not come to listen to expressions of vindictive hatred, but to comfort you and help you in the awful situation in which you have placed yourself."

The young man fell upon his face again with a bitter groan.

"Let them do their worst. I do not care to live."

Long the father talked to his lost boy, until the slanting sunlight cast the shadow of the bars that grated the window in hideous network on the opposite wall. Then strange sounds began to float in on the evening air. At first distant and heard but faintly; then nearer and louder, until the very walls shuddered with the horrid din.

The young man roused himself and started up in terror; the elder sat pale and trembling with an awful dread.

"Fetch him out!"

"String him up to the first tree!"

"Cut out the heart of the bloody varlet!"

"Lynch him!"

"No mercy to the bloodthirsty cutthroat!"

"Whurroo! the black-hearted blaggard that 'u'd let two lads hang that niver hurted 'um, the thafe o' the worruld! Whel! the dirty bolde aff 'um!"

Such were the angry cries that made Pandemonium around the walls of the jail.

"They have come for me!" cried Fred, ghastly with terror; and then, with a wild recklessness:

"Well, let them come!"

The father went to the grated window and looked out. A wild yell greeted his appearance; the crowd surged backward and forward, clamoring for admittance; and a shower of stones were hurled at the window, some striking the walls of the building and others falling into the cell.

Then there was a sound of violently opened doors, and the rush of a yelling, excited mob along the corridor. Fred leaped to a corner of the cell, with the look of an animal at bay; his father placed himself before him, with clasped hands and eyes of supplication and terror.

CHAPTER XXI. STORMING A JAIL.

OUT on the smooth surface of Dead Man's Hole the boats moved slowly to and fro. On the bluff the throng had gradually increased, until it consisted of scores of social carrion-crows that flocked to the scene of blood like their namesakes of the air—ruffians of every type and degree of crime, with a sprinkling of honest, yet rude and illiterate men.

And now the rowers in one of the boats are seen to pause. The man at the drag begins to pull the rope, slowly and with a look of horrified expectancy. Slowly it rises from the watery depths, at first seen obscurely, a shapeless mass, and then assuming outlines that cause the stoutest heart to quail. Up, up, until the surface is broken, the water falling away on every side as if in horror, and the awful thing is brought to the light and air of heaven.

Shuddering and with averted faces they draw it into the boat, dripping with water and trailing with weeds, as if they clung to it, loth to give up their prey. Then the oarsmen, with one hand on the oar and one before their eyes to shut the ghastly thing from view, pull for the shore. And the other boats, giving over their search, follow one by one.

The crowd on the bluff is thrilled by a wild excitement. Hoarse cries echo through the woods to call in the wanderers, and all hurry to the landing.

The boat grazes the pier. The hideous thing is lifted and laid upon the green sward. The human birds of filth flock around and glut their greedy gaze upon it, jostling each other to gain a nearer view. Not a detail is lost—the rigid limbs with their clinging garments; the hair, dank with the slime of

the river and matted with weeds and sand; the face—ah! what had once been a face, now all torn and mutilated by fiendish violence, a livid horror!

At sight of that the crowd began to surge and sway. Dark frowns contracted beetling brows; fierce gleams kindled in bloodshot eyes; and ominous murmurings of vengeance passed from lip to lip.

Among the crowd was a blue-shirted roustabout who had that morning been discharged from one of the river boats. He stood over six feet high, with a villainous face, rendered still more hideous by a scar that seamed his cheek from temple to chin. A tangled mass of black hair, falling from beneath a dilapidated straw hat, and shaggy black brows, made up the picture of a proper leader for this villainous crowd in any deed of violence.

"I tell yer what it is, feller-citizens," he cried, drawing himself up to his greatest height and glaring around on the mob, "it was a black-hearted cuss that passed in that feller's cheeks fur him!"

His pointing finger drew every eye to the mangled form on the grass. Waiting for his words and gesture to have their due effect, he suddenly cried, in a voice of thunder, while his burning glance passed from face to face:

"Is he among us?"

So startling was the effect that every man drew back and glanced at his neighbor.

"No, it was a rich man's son," volunteered a voice.

"Hah! the rich, that build stone jails for poor men to live in!" hissed the giant.

"He would 'a' let two honest b'yes hang in his place, the blagg'ard!" yelled the Irishman.

"Where are they? Show 'em up!" cried voices from the crowd.

"Here they be, as smilin' as twin roses, the beggars!"

"Up wid 'um. Let's see their mugs!" was the cry.

There was a scuffling movement in the crowd, and the two "honest b'yes" appeared above the heads of the rest, supported on the shoulders of their enthusiastic partisans, their villainous countenances broadened by grim smiles of triumph. They were saluted by wild yells and cheers and tossing of hats.

"Whurrool the divils!—the patent leather gints couldn't hang 'um, bad 'cess to the murderin' thaves!"

"Feller-citizens," yelled the roustabout, finding that the interest was wandering from himself, "does honest men stand idle and see a feller-man butchered in cold blood, and do nothin'?"

"Never!" whooped a chorus of voices.

"Do they leave the red-handed murderer to the judges and lawyers, to be bought off and shuffled out o' the country, while his dead victim is chucked inter a hole to rot and be forgotten?"

"No, never! never!"

"What does honest men do—men that wants ter sleep safe in their beds o' nights?"

"Hang him!"

"Draw and quarter the black-hearted villain!"

"String him up to the nearest tree!"

"Men!" yelled the giant, silencing the wild tumult his voice had evoked—"men! here's the dead and chawed-up victim—the murderer is hidin' in yonder jail."

With one finger he pointed to the motionless body, and stretched out his other arm in the direction of the city. A deathlike silence fell upon the crowd, the calm before the bursting of a storm-cloud; and in that moment of stillness he vociferated one word in clarion tones:

"AWAY!"

There was a wild surging in the crowd, a Pandemonium of discordant cries, and then they poured down the bluff in a mad stream, goading each other to frenzy by vengeful yells.

Through the quiet suburbs, into the busier streets, to the door of the jail they rushed, arming themselves with cudgels and stones as they went. The leader took forcible possession of a rope that hung in front of a store.

Mr. Prescott, supported by the turnkey, detective Smith and a policeman, appeared on the steps of the jail.

"Look a-here, men," he shouted, "what do you want?"

"We want the murderer!"

"And we're a-goin' ter have him!"

"Hand out the bloody cutthroat!"

"Whoop! Let 'im hang, as he'd 'a' hung two of as gallant b'yes as ever were merry over a bottle 'o potheen!"

"Trot him out, the lily-fingered dandy! Let's see if rich men hang like poor men!"

"I say, men," again vociferated the chief of police, "you'd better go home and mind your own business. Leave the law alone, or some of you will get more than you bargain for."

"That's the way they talk it—breakin' stone fur honest poor men, an' dainty dinners an' keerages fur rich murderers!"

"Shet up yer old pertater-trap, ur we'll stuff it with rocks!"

"Show up the murderer, ur we'll tear down yer old stone shanty!"

"Look-a-here, Mr. Prescott, we don't want ter hurt you; but we want that butcher of honest men, and we're a-goin' to have 'im!"

"Whoop! drag 'im out o' ther shebang!"

"Fetch 'im out on two chips!"

"No more palaver! In we go! Stand aside you what don't want ter git hurt!"

It was the giant roustabout who spoke, and flourishing the rope in one hand and a pistol in the other, he began mounting the steps that led to the jail door.

"Whurrool come on, an' we'll snatch the face off the bloody thafe o' the worruld!" yelled the defender of "honest b'yes" at his heels.

"Keep off there, you devils!" shouted the chief of police, with drawn revolver; but a shower of stones and the whistling of several bullets from the crowd warned him of the danger of himself and his little band, and he withdrew into the house and secured the door.

"Pass up an ax here an' we'll pull the shebang down about their ears," cried the roustabout.

The implement was got from a woodpile near at hand, and the vigorous blows of the giant soon beat in the frail barrier.

"Hurrah! Forward, men!" he cried, leaping over

the debris, followed by a jostling crowd of eager ruffians.

The door gave them admittance to the part of the jail occupied by the turnkey's family. Some of the rioters, seeing a chance for plunder, scattered among the rooms, securing whatever they could secrete about their persons. Others, headed by the roustabout, kept on to the grated door which separated the jail proper from that part occupied as a dwelling.

The chief of police, detective Smith, the policeman, the turnkey and his family had retreated behind this barrier.

"Mr. Prescott," said the turnkey, "this is a pretty tight box. We have our duties to ourselves, and here are these innocent women and children that ain't to be sacrificed trying to protect a man whose guilt is pretty clear. I don't say but what we ought to stick by him to a reasonable extent; but I don't believe we are in duty bound to risk our own necks for him. I move that we surrender."

"But these ragamuffins mustn't be let to run over us roughshod, as if there was no law in the land," expostulated the chief of police, whose blood was up. "Curse 'em! I'll let daylight through some of 'em if they try to pass that grating."

The distinction between Dan Prescott and the "ragamuffins" whom he held in such contempt was, that he had made money selling whisky on River street, and being something of a demagogue had wound his way to the high and mighty office of chief of police. His qualifications for the office lay in the adage: "Set a thief to catch a thief." That his quondam fellow "ragamuffins" should forget the sanctity of his august position, and trample under foot the law which he represented, galled him mightily. Hence his choler.

"Mr. Prescott," said the detective, "I think I must enter my protest with Mr. Turnkey. These women and children must not be made to incur the rage of the mob, heightened by a useless resistance. They're bound to come, and we can't help ourselves."

"Well, gentlemen, you outvote me. Do as you please. But remember that I proposed to stick by the law. I wash my hands of the whole business."

By this time the rioters were rattling at the gate. Waving a handkerchief in token of a desired parley, the turnkey advanced to the inside of the grating.

"Gents," he said, "we folks in here air armed, and might make it pretty tough work fur you to git in; but we don't want to shed no blood in this here affair, fightin' over a man what's guilty o' murder—"

"That's the way to talk it, old hoss! You're right; he's guilty o' murder! Jest hand him out, an' we won't hev no more talk," interrupted one of the assailants.

"Jest you keep your shirt on until I git through, Bill Jones," said the turnkey, with some show of asperity. "As I was sayin', we've got some women in here what's got to be respected, or some one will be carried out feet first!"

"We don't care nothin' about yer women. Just let us clap our claws on this here fine gentleman murderer, and we'll vamose the ranch right smart."

"All right. Jest give us time to git the women folks in the other ward."

"Open the dure, ye dirty blagg'ard!" roared an impatient one, seeing the turnkey going away, and having heard the arrangement.

While matters were being explained to him, the frightened women and children were hurried by the grating in making the transit of which they were greeted by a Comanche war-whoop by the crowd outside. Then the defenders of the jail ranged themselves with drawn weapons across the passage leading into the ward into which they had gone, leaving open the one where Fred was confined.

Then the bolt was shot, the turnkey sprang back among his friends, and the mob poured into the passage. The weapons of the turnkey and party kept a free space before them; and the rioters swept down the other corridor.

Arriving at Fred's cell they found it locked, and began to shake the grated door violently, with yells and curses, glaring upon him with bloodshot eyes and gnashing teeth, like very demons.

"Pull the thing down!"

"Hand him out here, till we give him a close-fittin' collar!"

"Trot him along!"

"Whoop! the devil! He'd let two honest b'yes hang for 'um, would he?"

"Pass along a crowbar. We'll soon unearth him."

"No, no; the keys."

"Where air the keys?"

"Why the blazes don't ye trot 'im out!"

"Scratch that turnkey baldheaded! What's he done with the keys?"

"Fetch 'im out on two chips!" yelled the facetious individual, who had proffered the same petition before.

"Here's the keys. Now snake 'im out o' that like greased lightnin'!"

The door swung open and the mob rushed in. The father was swept aside and fell fainting in a corner, to be trampled on by the rage-blinded demons.

Fred fought with the frantic energy of despair; but a stone thrown from the corridor rendered him almost unconscious, and he was pounced upon and securely bound.

"Back out o' there! We've got him."

And the roustabout, in the excitement of the moment, emphasized his command by vigorously punching some of his nearest neighbors, who were pressing upon him too closely.

Slowly the crowd yielded, looking back to assure themselves of the actual possession of the prize; and when Fred was dragged into the corridor his appearance was greeted by a series of demoniac howls and groans.

Out of the jail into the street they passed, leaving the father stunned and bleeding in the corner of the cell.

At the door of the jail grew a gigantic oak, and a would-be hangman was already astride one of the lower limbs, adjusting the rope that dangled to the ground. Ready hands grasped one end of the rope, while others ran a noose in the other end.

"Pass him along! Here's a collar cut to fit!"

"Let him dance a hornpipe on nothin'!"

"Stretch his cussed neck!"

"Up she goes! He-yo!"

"Stop yer cussed bawlin'! We're a-goin' ter take 'im ter Dead Man's Bluff, ter see his victim, if this child knows anything about it."

There was a kind of poetical justice in this that appealed to every mind; and the proposition was received by a general yell of approval.

Out from the busy heart of the city into the quiet suburbs, from many of the dwelling-houses of which women had fled in terror, they passed—out by the very home of their hapless victim.

May was aroused from the stupor into which she had fallen by the hideous uproar that was approaching the house. With tottering knees, yet supported by excitement, she dragged herself to a window; and there amid that wildly-gesticulating throng she saw a man, hatless, contess, his face covered with blood and dirt, his eyes protruding with terror, and foam standing on his lips; on either hand a ruffian supported him by his arms, bound behind his back; and around his neck a rope at which a hundred hands were dragging, while others held back to prevent him from being choked to death before the time.

One moment she gazed at that ghastly face, at the hair blowing in the wind, and then, with her hand to her head, sunk lifeless to the floor.

CHAPTER XXII.

JUDGE LYNCH.

FLORENCE GOLDTHORP was in a pitiable state when Charles Brewster helped her into the carriage. He followed her, and taking up the reins, drove directly to her home.

"Oh, Mr. Brewster!" she said, "is he guilty? Have they proof?"

Somehow it was easier to believe him guilty of an impulsive, unpremeditated murder, smarting under a sense of injury, than of cold, calculating forgery.

"I fear there can be scarcely a doubt of his having committed the act; but it must have been in a moment of passion, and unintentional."

"Oh, thank you, Mr. Brewster. You always understand Frederick. He never meant to do it, I know. But if he had only waited—if he had only waited! We should have cleared him—I know we should. But now it is too late. Oh, that he should have done such a deed!"

She covered her face with her hands, and wept and moaned.

Charles could not comfort her. His own heart was full. He was thinking of the look May had given him when he announced the death of her lover; and it wrung his heart to think of her feelings when she learned that her own brother was the murderer.

He parted with Florence at the door of her home, and then went to Dead Man's Bluff. He was at the landing when the boat brought its dreadful load to the shore. He gazed into the face of the dead, or into what had been a face, and shuddering, sighed.

"Poor May! She can never look upon him. It would kill her. And to think that her own brother should do it! He must have gone insane, or he never could have mutilated him so. Well, Cecil has accomplished his work. No one could wish one more abject than Fred. He has crushed him, but at the expense of his own life."

He was awakened from his meditations by the vengeful turn the crowd had taken. He saw what was coming, but too late to take measures to prevent the catastrophe. He set out for the city, borne along in the rush of the mob.

Meanwhile Florence had sent a man to Dead Man's Bluff, charged to bring her the intelligence when the body was found. Then she went to bed, overcome by the events of the past two days. It was while tossing on a bed of suffering, that news was brought her of the awful peril that threatened her lover. At the announcement, all her weakness left her. She arose and dressed, and ordered her saddle horse. Mounting, she set out toward the city, with no plan of action, only that she must save him.

But what could her weak arm avail against the frenzied mob that was dragging him to his doom? Onward, onward, ever nearing the fatal spot where lay his victim! and the wild frenzy rising higher and higher, as they drew near! Along the river bank and up the bluff, until they stood on the dread spot, and the murderer was forced to look upon the work of his own hands!

Then the discordant yells of vengeance and the dangling rope!

"Hand him up here, an' no more foolishin'!"

"Hold on, pard; the cove's got ter have a fair trial. It won't cure one murder to commit another. The thing's got to be done 'cordin' ter law. Who air ye goin' ter have fur Judge Lynch?"

"Judge Lynch be blowed! We know he's guilty, an' that's enough. Trot him right along. Money don't go down with us. He's got ter swing like a poor man."

"Look a-here, my friend, air ye goin' ter take it on yourself ter be judge, jury, witnesses an' hangman, all ter oncet? That's jest what we want ter be informed about," said the roustabout, with a menacing frown.

"Cuss yer law! What we want is justice. A man's been killed here, and somebody's got ter swing, sartain!"

"You look like a slap-up specimen, you do; but if you want ter jump right up onto my muscle, you'd better say this cuss hain't goin' ter have a fair and square trial. That's jest what sort of a man I am—you can put up or shut up!"

As the other showed no desire to "jump upon the muscle" of the roustabout, he turned to the crowd and said:

"Who's goin' to be Judge Lynch in this here trial?"

"I go my pile on you. I reckon you're the man fer the place," said one, and the rest joined in a vociferous acclaim.

"All right, gents. Trot out yer witness."

The fisherman was led forward, half frightened to death.

"Look a-here, pard," said the roustabout, with a frown that was anything but reassuring, "do you swear that this is the kid what run by you last night?"

"That's him, yer honor, so help me God!" sputtered the terrified witness.

"I guess that settles the matter, don't it, gents?" asked the "judge."

"Oh, yes; we know a heap more'n we did afore,"

sneered the man who had been snubbed by the roustabout.

"Look a-here, stranger, there'll be a row in this here camp in about two minutes and a half, if you don't put a stopper on that pertater-trap o' yourn. I should hate to spile yer beauty; but I reckon you'll swaller enough teeth ter set up a dentist shop righ smart."

Having quelled his opponent, the "judge" again turned to the court.

"I reckon there's only one punishment for the crime o' murder. How is it, gents? Jest speak your minds."

"Hang him!"

"Stretch his cussed neck!"

"Hold up; let him spout first."

"Dry up yer chin-music, and don't yer go ter instructin' the judge. One's enough ter run this here machine. Jest you keep in your end o' the shop. Has the prisoner anything ter say, why he shouldn't stretch the hemp?"

The "judge" paused; but the "prisoner" was stupid with terror, and attempted to say nothing.

"The prisoner is silent. Jest somethin' less'n three score an' ten git a holt o' t'other end o' the rope, while I fix this necklace becomin'ly."

"Whoo! bear a hand, b'yes, and remember he'd 'a' let two honest lads swing in his place."

"Lift him tenderly. It's not every day you have a gentleman o' means at t'other end o' the rope."

"The money he stole from his dad won't buy off this here crowd, eh, gents?"

"Put a fancy knot in that there neck-tiel!"

"Air you ready? He—"

"Hold up, therel! Slack up on that there rope!"

The premature pull had deranged the knot. The roustabout rearranged it, and held the noose over the head of the prisoner.

Bound hand and foot with a ruffian on either side holding him by the arms, with Judge Lynch just about to drop the noose over his neck, and more than a score at the other end of the rope only too eager to give the fatal tug, Fred Powell was indeed in a critical situation.

He thought of the sister who had grown at his side from earliest infancy; he thought of the father whom he had last seen lying stunned and bleeding in a corner of the cell, trampled by heedless feet; then he thought of her who had said:

"Frederick, I love you more than a sister—more than a father—more than a mother! I trust you as I trust my God!"

How had he rewarded that love! Covered her with shame—worse than that, made her an object of pity, as the affianced bride of a murderer! And her trust! Would not a murderer do any thing? A drunkard, a gambler, a murderer—proved beyond the shadow of a doubt! And would she believe that two links in the chain were wanting?—forgery and theft! Would her simple faith in him, thus rudely shaken, prevail against the evidence that had convinced his grandfather, his sister, his father? He could not hope it. He hung his head in abject misery, and was almost glad that it would so soon be over.

"Say yer prayers, if you've got any to say," said the executioner, as he hesitated a moment.

Fred shuddered. Could a murderer pray? Then appeared to his mind a vision before which all the affairs of this world sunk into utter insignificance. He saw his soul steeped in the blood of a fallen creature. He saw the dread, accusing frown of the Just Judge, and shuddering, fainting, sickening with horror, he waited for the awful moment.

"As judge o' this court, I hereby carry out its sentence; and may God have mercy on your soul!" said the roustabout, in horrible mockery of judicial form.

Then, with one awful moment of suspense, he let the noose fall; and, with a wild yell, a hundred hands tugged at the rope.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A WOMAN'S ACT.

MOUNTED on a coal-black charger, that had carried his rider through many a fight in the war for the Union, Florence Goldthorp rode into the city at a breakneck pace. She thought only of her lover, and of the dreadful peril that threatened him. She had thrust a small silver-mounted pistol into the bosom of her dress, and her flashing eyes and firm-set lips told her resolve to defend him at all hazards.

She knew that her feeble arm unaided could avail nothing, and looked about for assistance. In this strait she came across Charley Brewster with a small posse of police whom he had gathered. Most of the guardians of the city's peace had construed their duty in accordance with prudence, and were conveniently out of the way.

"Mr. Brewster," cried Florence, "you can do nothing with so small a body of men on foot. Half a dozen mounted men can accomplish more than a score without horses. Go to a livery-stable and mount your men on the best horses you can find."

Charley saw the force of her reasoning, and acted on the suggestion at once. But innumerable delays arose; and when at last they set out the rioters were well-nigh at Dead Man's Bluff.

"Come on! For heaven's sake, ride as fast as you can, or we shall be too late!" cried Florence, urging her horse into a wild gallop.

The policemen strove not to be outdone by a woman; but she was better mounted than any of the rest, and was soon far in advance.

Nearer to that horrible scene of bloodthirstiness, her blood curdled by the wild shouts that came to her on the soft-breathing zephyrs! Faster and faster she rode, until the scene in all its fiendishness burst upon her vision! She saw the fatal rope dangling from a limb, the noose held above the head of her lover, the frenzied mob that awaited the signal to pull!

Sick with horror, dizzy with the blood that surged into her brain and then rushed back upon her heart, she uttered the command:

"Charge!"

Her steed summoned all his energies into his sinews of steel. With ears close to his head, with blazing eyes and streaming nostrils, he leaped the outer circle of spectators, clearing the heads of some, trampling some under foot! On, on, until he was brought up on his haunches in the very center of the surging mob, by a tightening of the rein and the command:

"Halt!"

So engrossed had all been in the fiendish work, that they knew nothing of her presence until the first leap that brought her into their very midst. Then a shout of terror and warning arose, as the black horse descended among them, knocking some of them bleeding and unconscious to the ground. Again he vaulted into the air; one of the men who was holding Fred saw him, leaped aside to avoid the shock, and dragged the wretched captive from beneath the fatal noose. At the same instant the noose fell, striking Fred on the shoulder; the would-be hangmen yelled and gave a violent tug, that caused the rope to run over the limb and themselves to fall in a heap; and the loaded end of Florence's riding-whip descended upon the head of the roustabout, sending him reeling against the tree.

The ruffian recovered himself and drew his revolver. Florence, quicker than he, whipped out her own weapon and drew trigger, with the pistol covering the villain's heart. The hammer descended, but there was no report. One of the chambers had been unloaded.

With a hoarse laugh of triumph, the heartless demon fired at the heroic girl, and Florence slid to the ground.

A wild yell of rage and terror burst from the mob at this dastardly act. A little man, all bone and muscle, leaped upon the roustabout and knocked the yet-smoking weapon from his hand. The giant whirled round and grappled his antagonist, and they rolled on the ground, under the feet of the surging throng.

Wild yells arose on every hand. The crowd heaved and tossed like an angry sea, in their mad efforts to reach the center. The stronger elbowed the weaker aside, or struck out vigorously with their fists to clear a way for themselves. Smarting from the blows, the assailed retorted in kind, and then ensued a scene that baffles description—a Western "free fight." Every man fought on his own account, with the motto of Donnybrook Fair: "Wherever you see a head, hit it!" only the weapons were bowie-knives and pistols, instead of shillalabs.

And in the midst of this Pandemonium stood a woman!—unhurt as yet; for, blinded by the stunning blow, the roustabout was unable to take accurate aim; but in how awful a situation! Her horse stood quivering in every nerve, but he did not move. He felt her hand on the rein, and heard her voice command:

"Duke, halt!"

But Florence was not idle. She plucked a heavy bowie-knife from the girdle of a man who stood near her, and with its keen blade severed the ligatures that bound the hands of her lover.

"Here, Fred, the horse!" she cried.

"Not just yit, if ye please!" said a ruffian, catching Fred by the shoulder and tripping him up.

His feet were yet bound, and he was almost helpless.

"Doolan! McReady! Laven!" cried Florence, appealing to men who were known to her and stood near, "I saved your wives and children from starvation and the fever! Will you see him murdered before your very eyes—nay, assist in his murder? For shame, men! Help me to rescue him!"

As she spoke, she stooped down, and with a slash cut the bonds that secured her lover's feet. Fred felt his release and made a violent struggle for life. In that moment he was endowed with almost superhuman strength. He rolled over the man who had sprung upon him, and struggled to his feet.

But the would-be executioners were loth to be cheated of their victim. They sprung upon him in numbers, with blows and curses, and he was again borne to the ground.

But rescue was at hand. Florence's appeal had not been without effect. The men whom she addressed at first hung their heads; and then, seeing Fred beaten down a second time, they leaped upon his assailants with an Irishman's impulsive readiness to fight for any cause that enlists his sympathies.

Striking out right and left, thwacking heads with fists and shillalabs, pulling here and hauling there, they gradually reduced the heap of human tigers that had piled upon the unfortunate Fred. Then, blinded by blood and dirt, with torn clothes and body covered with bruises, the victim of lynch law was jerked roughly, yet kindly, to his feet, by one of those whom Florence's words had enlisted on his side.

Florence caught him in her arms, as he staggered blindly, and drew him away.

"Here is Duke. Get upon him, and ride for your life!"

"Florence, is this you?" he cried, brushing the blood out of his eyes. "What a place for you! Mount instantly yourself. Here, I will help you."

He essayed to help her—he, who could scarcely sustain his own weight.

"No, no!" she cried, "I have friends; I am safe. But you—save yourself, as you love me!"

Further debate was cut off by a concerted yell that rose above the general tumult, and a discharge of pistols in a volley that made itself heard above the random shots. Then there was a surging of the crowd apart, and a body of mounted policemen, headed by Charley Brewster, urged their way to the black horse and his mistress.

There was a momentary pause, and while the policemen clustered around with threatening weapons, Charley leaped to the ground.

"Take my horse, Fred!" he cried, as he lifted Florence into her saddle.

But Fred did not comply.

"Give me a lift, Charley," he said, with one hand on the cantle of Florence's saddle.

There was no time for hesitation or questions. Charley placed his hand on his knee; Fred made a step of it, and leaped astride of Duke, behind Florence. Charley mounted his own horse; and the party dashed from the crowd, followed by a shower of bullets that made one policeman's horse riderless, while another officer reeled in his seat.

Then Charley Brewster saw what Fred had done. He had interposed his own body between her and the bullets he knew would follow their flight.

Just as the sun sank from view behind a bank of clouds that were rapidly coming up in the west, they emerged into the country road, and Fred was safe for the time.

It was proposed to carry him to a jail in an adjoining county; and they set out with a twelve miles' ride before them. The storm was upon them before they had accomplished half the distance. The men slouched their hats over their faces, drew up their coat-collars, and dashed ahead, with the rain pelting in their faces.

Amid crashing thunder and lightning zigzagging across the sky, they drove up to the jail. Lanterns were brought and the party dismounted. When they came to look for their prisoner, he was nowhere to be found. The black horse and his mistress had also disappeared.

Late that night Duke galloped up to the gate, and his dragged and mud-bespattered mistress dismounted and led him into the stable.

"Good Duke! Noble fellow!" she said caressingly, taking his head in her arms and laying her cheek against his, and the animal whinnied gratefully and nibbled at the sleeve of her dress.

Then she went into the house and to bed, and the next morning was in a high fever, from excitement and exposure.

CHAPTER XXIV.

TO THE DEATH.

WHEN Duke bore the lovers out of the clutches of Judge Lynch, Fred shielded with his own the body of his brave preserver. He saw the policeman fall from his saddle; and clasping Florence close in his arms, he dug his heels into Duke's flanks and urged him to still greater exertions.

It was but a moment, and then they had left their bloodthirsty persecutors behind. Down the country road they coursed, and gradually Duke fell into the rear, while Charley Brewster led the van.

Then Fred Powell pressed his swollen lips to the cheek of the woman who had so nearly lost her life in rescuing him, and said:

"God bless you, my darling! How you must love me to risk so much in my defense!"

She let her velvet cheek rest against his bruised and bloody one, and whispered:

"Love you? I love you better than my life!"

"But what fearful peril! My heart yet quails to think of it!"

"I shared it with you, dearest! I could gladly pass through death at your side!"

He held her close to his heart, and sighed to think what wretchedness her love for him must bring her.

"Ours is a sad love, Florence. I sometimes hate myself for dragging you into the shadow of my crime."

"And yet, could you give me up?"

"No! no! a thousand times no!" he cried, straining her to him at the thought of losing her.

"I knew it, Fred," she replied, with a happy smile.

"Neither would I give you up, for the happiest love that woman was ever blessed with. My love is deeper, stronger than it could be without its sorrow. The happiness of this moment repays all."

"But my crime, Florence; for I am guilty of this—can you love me with blood on my soul?"

A spasm of pain shot across her face.

"Fred, a woman who truly loves never asks what the object of her love has done, but what he has suffered."

His heart swelled with gratitude for her devotion. For a moment there was a wild purpose seething in his brain. If he could escape and take her with him where they would never be found! No; if he went, he must go alone. It would be cruel to drag her away from friends and home into an exile that might be one continuous flight.

"Florence," he whispered, with his lips to her ear, "I must not be taken to that jail. Help me to escape."

She started violently, and then pale with fear, asked:

"How?"

"Don't you see, the storm will soon be upon us, and we can drop behind in the darkness. Leave it to me; I will manage it."

On, on they rode; and when they descended into a dark glade where the trees overhung the way, while the storm was at its height, he suddenly drew aside upon the grass, and then stopped the horse altogether, while the rest rode on unconscious of their loss. Turning aside into a bridle-path, he followed it until they came to a little opening. Here he drew up again, and leaped to the ground.

In a moment she was at his side, clinging to him.

"Oh, Fred, are you going?—and whither?"

He drew her under the shelter of a dense vine, that formed a natural arbor, and protected them from the storm. Seated here, he unfolded to her the dark future that lowered before him.

"Oh, take me with you, Fred," she whispered.

"You will need me. I cannot bear to let you go away alone. Take me with you, dearest! I shall be happier at your side, whatever privations and sufferings we have to undergo, than waiting, waiting, and never knowing what has happened to you."

He held her to him, mingling his tears with hers. The more she proved her love for him, the harder it was to give her up. He knew that picturing the suffering she must endure in his company would not shake her purpose; so he made her unselfish love for him, her willingness to do and suffer anything to secure his well-being, the means of combating her desire.

"Flo!" he said, throwing inexpressible tenderness in the pet name, "how can I take you with me, even if I could consent to such a sacrifice? Alone I may escape. But how could both of us evade pursuit?"

She saw the force of his words, and almost hated her woman's weakness, that would make her a drag upon him.

Long they talked, and when at last they were forced to part, it was like rending their hearts asunder. But all things must have an end; and after the last clinging embrace, the last sweet pressure of the lips, Florence Goldthorp rode slowly home with a breaking heart, and Fred Powell stood alone in the darkness and the storm, an outcast, a fugitive from justice.

We will not stop to depict the life that Fred Powell was forced to lead for the next week—the fleeing by night, the hiding by day; the invasions of hen-roosts and orchards and cornfields to satisfy the cravings of hunger; the starts at an approaching footstep, the longing yet dread of seeing a human face, of hearing a human voice.

After long and weary flights, he thought himself

far enough away to venture into the presence of men. He chose a large city, as the place where he would be least likely to attract notice. Here he procured a hat and coat at a second-hand clothier's with the money given him by Florence at parting.

While he was making the purchase, the merchant whispered to a little girl who was playing at the door. She went into the back part of the house, and presently a villainous-looking fellow came lounging in, and glanced furtively at Fred.

With his heart in his mouth, Fred left the store. It was night; but he had not walked half a dozen blocks before he discovered that he was followed. Then began a series of maneuvers similar to those with which Cecil Beaumont had sought to shake off the emissaries of Tiger Dick.

With life as the stake we are all cunning. After vain endeavors to elude the man, who was dogging his footsteps, Fred drew him to a deserted part of the city; then started on a run and darted around a corner. Instantly he turned and crouched down in the shadow, at the very angle of the building. He had in his pocket the pistol with which Florence had tried to shoot the roustabout. As his pursuer came to the corner, Fred leaped upon him and dealt him a blow with the butt of the pistol that felled him insensible to the ground.

Fred looked up, and on the building within reach of his hand was a poster, giving a description of him and offering a reward for his apprehension. Shuddering he fled away and out of the city.

Two days later, footsore with weary marches and sick from exposure and insufficient food, he crept into a little hamlet and waited at the railway station for the train bound for the far West, in whose trackless wilderness he hoped to bury himself beyond the vengeance of his fellow-men.

While he sat in the waiting-room, two men sauntered along the platform and stopped opposite the open window.

"Five hundred dollars reward!" exclaimed one. "Judas! but that 'ud set us up in business in fine style!"

"Such plums don't drop inter a feller's mouth jest fur the hankerin' arter 'em, not by a long shot!" replied the other.

"T'won't do no hurt to try fur it," said the first speaker. "I'm goin' ter look at every stranger until I kin see cl'ar through him."

Fred waited for no more; but stepping out of the depot on the other side, and keeping the building between him and the men whom he had overheard, he gained a clump of trees and ran as hard as he could for half an hour. Then he stopped and listened. He was alone, with no sound but the sighing of the wind through the tree-tops.

Breathing more freely after his narrow escape, he again took up his weary march. Onward through the night he staggered, battling the reckless despondency that prompted him to seek food and rest, even at the risk of being captured and taken back. When the first streak of morning tinted the east, he sunk almost lifeless into a clump of undergrowth, and was soon in a slumber. But even there he was not free; for his sleep was haunted by horrible dreams.

The sun was an hour high, when two villainous-looking men might have been seen following the trail of Fred Powell. They were the men whom he had seen at the railway station, and none other than our old friends, McFarland and O'Toole.

"I say, O'Toole, don't you think we've played this game about long enough? We can drop him off the hooks anywhere out here, and nobody but the crows will know what became of him."

"Faith, I've thramped to me heart's content, me jewel! If ye say quits, whol quits it is."

"That settles the matter. We'll make crow-bait of him inside o' twenty-four hours. Then, Mr. Tiger Dick, old boss, git ready the beer-money, for we're a-comin'!"

Half an hour afterward, they came upon Fred sleeping.

"Hist!" warned McFarland; "he's taking a snooze."

He parted the bushes and looked in upon him.

It was a sad spectacle that met the ruffian, McFarland's eye; one that should have moved his heart to pity, but it did not. With his head on a knoll of turf and his pale, emaciated face half covered by his hat, lay Fred, in the sleep of exhaustion. His breathing was heavy and unnatural. Ever and anon he started, and a look of pain or terror crossed his face. Then he would half spring up, clutching with his hands and giving utterance to some half-articulate exclamation. A piteous scene, surely; but McFarland had sold his services for money, and he would not now be diverted from the accomplishment of his work.

"Shall we prod him as he sleeps?" he asked of his companion in crime, shrinking with a superstitious dread from such a deed.

"Sure, what difference will it make wi' him, I dunno?" asked O'Toole.

"Stick him yourself," said McFarland, stepping aside.

As he did so, he tripped on a twig, and the snapping sound awoke the sleeper. Like a startled stag he leaped to his feet; then stood a moment in bewilderment. His sudden movement startled the would-be murderers, and they leaped back. The next instant, Fred broke and ran with all his might.

"After him, or he'll git away!" cried McFarland.

"Howly Moses! Shoot the devil!" yelled O'Toole.

McFarland acted upon the suggestion and fired. Fred swerved from his course, clutched at a tree, and then turned at bay. In an instant his pistol covered O'Toole, who was aiming at him. There was a double report.

"Oh, swate Virgin, I'm shot!" yelled O'Toole, sinking to the ground, his face livid with cowardly fear.

McFarland leaped behind a tree, showing the craven in his trembling knees and chattering teeth.

But his fears were groundless. Fred Powell staggered a step forward, and then fell upon his face.

"Murdrer the devil, he's give me my lasht sickness," moaned O'Toole, in a fainting voice.

McFarland drew his knife, and leaped upon the prostrate Fred. But it was needless. He lay upon his side, with his head resting on his arm as in slumber. But the eyes were glazed that looked from the half-closed lids, and his blood dyed the green sward red with its crimson tide.

Branded as a felon; outlawed, with a price on his

head; hunted to earth like a wild beast; at last falling beneath the murderous hand of his foes; what more could the vengeance of Cecil Beaumont have craved?

PART III—WHEN ROGUES FALL OUT.

CHAPTER I.

A NEW HAND IN THE GAME.

THEY were a sad household at Mr. Powell's the morning following Fred's peril and escape. The banker had been brought home insensible, and now lay on a bed of torture, mental and physical. In her darkened room May, having given way to a paroxysm of wild grief, now lay in a lethargy of despair and exhaustion.

Charley Brewster called early to see if he could be of any service to the stricken household. He sent a bouquet of flowers to May's room, and then went to her father.

Mr. Powell listened to the story of his son's rescue with tears in his eyes.

"God bless the noble girl!" he said. "She deserves a happier fate."

Then Charley went to the inquest, which was appointed at nine.

Nothing is so remarkable as the usual scant loss of life in a Western "free fight," where revolvers and bowie-knives are in every man's hand. Of all engaged in the *melee* at Dead Man's Bluff only one was fatally wounded, and he an honest laboring-man who stood in the outskirts of the crowd, taking no active part in the fray. As is usually the case, he left a large family, made destitute, by his death, of all means of support. Some two or three scores bore off remembrances of their participation, ranging from a black eye to a nose bitten off, and from a prod with a bowie-knife to a bullet-shattered shoulder. But they philosophically regarded it as all in a lifetime, and patiently nursed their hurts for another set-to. Half a dozen of the ringleaders were arrested and lodged in jail, and the rest went about their usual vocations.

That afternoon Cecil Beaumont was buried; a reward for the apprehension of Frederick Powell was posted all over the country; the newspapers gave a highly-wrought account of the affair, with sensational headlines, in which "the lovely and accomplished Miss Goldthorp" was spoken of as a Joan of Arc; the newsboys bawled excitedly and honest people read calmly, and the world jogged on very much as before, for those not immediately interested.

The injury to policeman Croghan proving only slight, Tiger Dick was let off with a trifling fine. That evening a note was placed in his hand. He read it; looked puzzled; reread it, and burst into a prolonged guffaw.

"Ha! ha! ha! ho! ho! ho! Oh, he'll do to travel, he will!"

Then he read the letter again, carefully noting the plan of action sketched out.

"Ha! ha! ha! A game is never done until the last hand is played. By Jove! this is the nicest lay yet. I thought they had the deadwood on us, when I saw the coroner sitting on that carcass; but the Prince is like Samson—his death was the ten-strike of his worthless life. He! he! he! We've got 'em, body and breeches, this time, and no mistake."

Then he touched a bell, and sent for Shadow Jim and the rest of his crew, and was in counsel with them for a long time.

Several days now passed, without any incident worthy of note. Florence recovered so as not to be confined to her bed; but she went about the house sad-eyed and dejected. As for May, she seemed brokenhearted, and lay upon her pillow as wan as a broken lily. Mr. Powell managed to drag himself to his place of business, and with the help of Mr. Carrington finally got things in running order again. Then he went home utterly prostrated. All the time Charley Brewster was of invaluable service, and smoothed over many a rough spot by his thoughtfulness and consideration.

One evening a stranger came to town, and having secured lodgings in an unpretentious quarter, began to lounge about like a man who had nothing particular on his hands. He gave direction to the conversation in an aimless way, here and there asking a question. As he was a good listener, he picked up quite a deal of information about all the parties concerned in the late stirring events.

He went to "The Jungle," and while risking small sums in the game, watched the Tiger furtively. Tiger Dick noticed that he was a stranger; but seeing nothing unusual about him, gave him no further thought.

He then made the acquaintance of Mrs. McPherson, and representing himself as an old friend of Mr. Beaumont, drew from that unsuspecting lady all she knew about her deceased boarder. Mrs. McPherson was very partisan; and as he seemed such a pleasant spoken gentleman, and so warmly interested in everything that concerned Cecil, she confided to him the (from her point of view) heartless treatment Cecil had received at the hands of Florence Goldthorp; his distress of mind, as indicated by his ravings; his murder by her lover; his rival; her attempt to secure Fred from arrest; her rescue of him from the mob; and finally her connivance at his escape, to which act the wealth and position of her uncle gave immunity.

From Mrs. McPherson the unknown went to Florence's uncle. That gentleman was annoyed beyond expression at the public scandal in which his niece had involved herself. He at first refused point-blank to permit an interview; but when assured that it would involve no further publicity, and that her knowledge might materially aid the ends of justice, he finally yielded.

Having possessed himself of all that Florence knew and suspected in the matter, he next addressed himself to Charley Brewster. They soon arrived at a perfect understanding. There was a look of satisfaction, blended with sorrow, on Charley's face, as the interview drew to a close.

"At least we can remove the stigma from his name. I never believed him guilty. If he had only stayed his hand in that fatal encounter, how happily

all would have resulted! And to think that his life should be wrecked by such a villain! The death of Cecil Beaumont is but a poor atonement for the mischief he wrought. But may I tell his father? It will be a relief to him to know that his son is not the knave he thinks him."

"Not yet," objected the unknown. "There are others to be looked after. It will be time enough to tell him when my plans are fully matured."

"But Miss Goldthorp—your objections do not extend to her? She never believed him guilty."

"Wait until to-morrow. I have little doubt but that I am on the right track, but I must see with my own eyes. You say that he is not mutilated beyond recognition?"

"No. Any one who knew Cecil Beaumont would recognize the corpse, though the features are terribly mangled. I cannot see how Fred could have the heart to treat him so, after he was dead. He must have been insane."

"There are few men who could stand under the wrong that was heaped upon him without relishing a taste of revenge. Knowing oneself innocent, it would be hard to be made an outcast, while the real villain was treated as a saint. But this Billy Saunderson—I must shadow him. From what you tell me, I more than suspect that he has had some kind of a hand in this matter. I have had a great deal of experience with criminals, and it strikes me that there is an understanding between him and Tiger Dick. He didn't get Mr. Powell intoxicated on those two particular occasions for nothing."

"By Jove!" cried Brewster with a sudden thought. "It was between Beaumont and Saunderson that Mr. Powell, senior, was led to think that Fred was sunk to the depths of dissipation. Can there have been a concerted plot between Beaumont, Saunderson, and Tiger Dick?"

"I can't tell yet. If he is the man I believe him to be, he is equal to it. He would stop at nothing, and would prove himself fertile in resource, to effect his ends."

That evening the stranger, who passed by the name of Mr. Draper, of New York, made the acquaintance of Billy Saunderson. He proved himself a "jolly dog," and "cottoned" to the "decoy duck" from the first. They soon grew confidential over their wine, and Mr. Draper swore that he had never met a man so after his own heart as Mr. Saunderson. Billy, with his blood aglow with the liquor he had drank, stretched his hand across the table and said:

"Put it there, pard. You're just my cut to a T."

Mr. Draper grasped the hand of his new acquaintance, and they swore eternal friendship on the spot. The New York "sharp" then told of his exploits in the great metropolis. Judging from his talk he had been up to a little devilment of every sort. Not to be behind him, Billy told all the "dodges" that had exercised his peculiar genius, and more, too, eking out fact with fiction. His employment as "decoy duck" by Tiger Dick was too notable an event in his career to be omitted, and chief among his exploits in this character was the drugging of Fred Powell's wine, and inducing him to enter Tiger Dick's den. Billy had just sense enough to say nothing about the key, seeing that that event was so recent, and so much had flowed from it.

At twelve Mr. Draper took a reluctant leave of Mr. Saunderson, and went to meet Charley Brewster, the chief of police and detective Smith, according to previous appointment. They went directly to the cemetery, where two men were soon at work disinterring the body of Cecil Beaumont.

Without taking the coffin from the grave, the lid was removed and a dark lantern turned upon the face of the dead. As Charley had said, Cecil Beaumont was plainly recognizable, despite the mutilation of the features.

When Mr. Draper first looked upon the dead he gave a violent start and turned pale. Then he took the lantern in his own hand, and stooping down, lifted the hair from the left temple with trembling fingers. Among the roots a scar was discernible.

"Great Heaven! it is he!" he exclaimed; and then checking himself, got up out of the grave and intimated that he was satisfied.

There was a strange look upon his face, which Charley Brewster conceived to be a blending of regret, bewilderment and uncertainty, though what could give rise to these emotions he could not imagine.

Mr. Draper rode back to the city in perfect silence. What was the nature of his thoughts Charley could not divine. His face was perfectly impassible. When they parted, he took Charley's hand and said:

"Mr. Brewster, you may rest assured of these facts. On the two occasions when Mr. Powell was intoxicated, it was under the influence of drugs. He gambled when his brain was on fire with this influence, and only then. I am morally certain, although the absolute proof is not yet at my command, that he did not commit the forgery alleged against him, nor had he anything to do with the robbery of the bank. Miss Goldthorp has proved herself a woman of good sense. You may repeat to her what I have just told you as soon as you like. Only enjoin upon her the importance of perfect secrecy in the matter for the present. I allow you to tell her, for the satisfaction it may be to her to know that she is not alone in her confidence in Mr. Powell."

"And you believe that this is all a plot of Cecil Beaumont's?"

"Here's the way it looks to me: Billy Saunderson confesses himself to be acting in the capacity of 'decoy duck' for Tiger Dick. He drugs Mr. Powell, and induces him to gamble at Tiger Dick's table. A lucky accident sends Mr. Powell senior to Beaumont. He takes advantage of it to blast the character of the son. On the evening of the robbery, Saunderson again drugs Mr. Powell. What would be easier than to steal his key? Then, when the father is wavering, the forgery is brought upon the carpet, and clinches all."

"Mr. Draper, your solution is the correct one—I'll wager my life on it!"

"Well, good-by. I'm going to look for Frederick Powell, and get his story."

"But if you find him, will it not be your duty to give him up, for the murder of Cecil?" asked Brewster, with sudden pallor.

The look of perplexity returned to Mr. Draper's face.

"Leave me to take care of that," he said. "By

the way, where did Miss Goldthorp take leave of Mr. Powell on the night of his escape?"

"At a place called Griggs's Hollow, eight or ten miles up the river, in a bridge-path leading off the road."

"Thank you. And now, good-by."

CHAPTER II. A SNARE.

It was with a strange blending of pleasure and pain that Charley Brewster went to see Florence Goldthorp on the morning following the disinterment of Cecil Beaumont. He found her in excitement over her interview with Mr. Draper. She felt an undefined expectancy; of what she scarcely knew.

"Oh, Mr. Brewster," she said, eagerly, "you have seen Mr. Draper. What is the result? What has he accomplished?"

"I am not wholly received into his confidence yet; but I infer that Cecil Beaumont has been guilty of some great crime, at some time in his past life, and that Mr. Draper is a detective in pursuit of him and some other person or persons."

"And if he proves to be a villain, it will all be favorable to Frederick!" cried Florence, with clasped hands.

"Yes, Mr. Draper is already satisfied of the existence of a conspiracy against Frederick between Cecil, Tiger Dick and Saunderson."

"Did he say so?" asked Florence, eagerly.

"Yes."

"And what evidence has he?"

"He gained Billy's confidence, got him intoxicated, and drew from him the fact that he had drugged Frederick's wine—"

"Drugged it? Oh, I knew it! Dear Fred! I knew that he was not the dissipated wretch they tried to prove him."

"It was at the instigation of Tiger Dick, and getting him to gamble was part of the plot."

"Oh, the villains! And of course Tiger Dick was only the tool of Cecil Beaumont, the arch-hypocrite! He could have no interest of his own in ruining Fred."

"Mr. Draper is of opinion that Fred's key was stolen from him by Saunderson, and thus came into the hands of Tiger Dick."

"Oh, how blind they were not to see it! And yet"—with a sudden spasm of pain—"Mr. Carrington said that when asked for his key, Fred at first grew violent and resorted to equivocation, and then said that he had lost it. Why did he not say so at the beginning?"

"May he not have learned the suspicion resting against some one; and having lost his keys, at first have been afraid to acknowledge it?"

"It must be that. But what a fatal mistake! Poor Fred! he was surrounded on every side. But the forgery—did he gain any further light on that?"

"Only as far as we got—the absence of motive, and the probability of its being a part of the existing plot."

"Oh, we should have cleared him completely. Why was he fated to commit that one dreadful act?"

"She buried her face in her hands and wept afresh. It was done in the heat of passion; and the attendant circumstances will so far extenuate the case, that I do not believe that a jury can be impaneled that will make it a case of the first degree."

"But he must never be taken. It was but a just punishment for Cecil Beaumont's crimes. And Frederick would die in prison."

An angry flash mingled with her grief. Suddenly a thought lighted her face with something like hope.

"Mr. Brewster," she said, "they were fighting; might not Fred have killed him in self-defense?"

"It would be hard to satisfy a jury of it," Charley replied, thinking of the mutilation of the corpse, which would go against Fred.

Then telling her of the movements of Mr. Draper in search of Fred, Charley took his departure, leaving her weeping over the cruel fate that had defeated all their efforts by staining the hands of her lover with blood.

On the following day, as the sun was slowly passing down the western sky, Florence went out for her usual afternoon ride. She had neared the spot where she had last seen Fred, previous to his rescue from the mob, when she was met by a man who had the appearance of a farm-hand.

"Beg pardon, ma'am; but be you Miss Goldthorp?" he asked, awkwardly.

"That is my name," replied Florence, looking at him curiously.

The fellow fumbled in his blouse, glanced around as if to assure himself that they were unobserved, and then produced a letter.

"This was gi'n me to hand to you, ma'am," he said, extending it toward her.

Florence took the letter and changed color, the moment she glanced at the superscription.

"Who gave this to you?" she asked, breathlessly.

"Dunno his name. Never see'd him afore. He gi'n me a dollar, an' made me promise to gi' you the letter, when nobody see'd us."

"And what did he look like? Describe him."

"He was a good-lookin' young feller, only considerable chawed up. Guess he'd been in a fight. He looked mighty bad."

"And where did you see him, and when?"

"About a mile furdur up the creek, last night."

"And shall you see him again? Were you to take an answer to him?"

"He didn't say nothin' about no answer, only I was to gi' you the letter, unbeknownst to anybody."

"Wait a moment, until I read it."

It was written in lead-pencil, and read:

"Florence, meet me to-night at twelve where I last saw you."

FRED.

With a wild pulsing of the heart, Florence drew forth her purse and tendered some money to the bearer of the missive which she held in her hand. He took it with an awkward bow of acknowledgment and a "Thank-ee ma'am!" and shambled off down the road.

Then Florence turned her horse's head homeward and rode like the wind; but his swiftest dash could not keep pace with her impatience.

Locked in her room, she read the note again and again, pressing it to her lips and heart.

"Oh, my darling!" she whispered, "why does he not fly? Why does he linger where accident may at

any moment betray him into the hands of his enemies?"

It seemed as if the sun would never set; and when at last it sunk below the horizon, she set herself to watch the slow-moving hands of the clock. Sitting in her darkened room, she listened to the noises in the house. Would they never cease? Would the servants never go to bed?

One by one the lights went out, and gradually the house sunk to repose. Then a feeling of awful desolation crept over her. A thousand fears racked her bosom, as she counted the seconds until eleven o'clock.

Then she rose, and stole noiselessly down the stairs and into the yard. She had no difficulty in saddling a palfrey which usually served her. She did not need Duke for her present errand.

With tremblings lest her horse should neigh so as to awaken the hostler, she led him from the stable and out of the gate. Then she mounted, and rode away, at first at a walk, but when beyond earshot from the house, at an ever-quickenng gallop.

Eight miles from home she came to a point where the road descended into a dark glade, hedged about by the trees that interlaced their boughs above the way. Here she dismounted and tied her horse just off the road. Then, with trembling limbs and quick-beating heart, she ran down a bridge-path at right angles.

Half a dozen rods from the road she paused in expectancy. Then she descried a form that took a step toward her in the shadows.

With a glad cry she sprung forward, and threw herself into his arms.

"Fred! oh, Fred! how glad I—"

She felt his arms close about her; she felt his breath on her cheek; then, with a wild scream, she struggled violently to free herself, and falling, fainted dead away.

CHAPTER III.

A STARTLING ANNOUNCEMENT.

FLORENCE GOLDTHORP'S home was in a state of wild excitement. The coachman, upon going out to his morning's duties, had found her filly, under saddle and reeking with sweat, standing with her head over the gate. His first impression was that his young mistress had gone out for an early morning ride, and been thrown from her horse. But her maid had gone up and tapped on the door, and not receiving an answer, had entered and found that Florence's bed had not been occupied during the night.

Then her uncle was called, and he soon had servants riding in hot haste in every direction, to search for the missing girl. But the hours wore away and brought no tidings.

The news soon spread through the city, and Charley Brewster procured a horse and rode out to her home. Mr. Creswell had already engaged the police. Charley found him sitting at home, his brows knit in a painful frown, love struggling hard with anger.

"This is a sad affair, Mr. Creswell," he said. "I have come to help in the search, but first wished to acquaint myself with all the particulars of your niece's disappearance."

"I thank you, Mr. Brewster. You have proved yourself a true friend throughout the folly and madness of the past two weeks. As you have followed this scandalous affair from the beginning, through all its infamous phases, you will perhaps be partially prepared for the last act—the denouement in this nefarious drama. That miscreant has inveigled her from her home to join his villainous fortunes."

He tossed a piece of paper across the table to Charley, and rising began to pace the room, saying: "That was found on the floor of her room, where she doubtless dropped it."

Charley took the paper and read:

"Florence, meet me to-night at twelve, where I last saw you."

FRED.

Then a shade of disappointment passed over his face.

"I was not prepared for this, sir," he said. "I would not have believed that Fred could do her such a wrong."

"A drunkard, a gambler, a forger, a robber, a murderer! Pish! what would such a man scruple to do?"

"But, sir, he loved her. She was his promised wife. How could he have the heart to tie her to an outcast—a murderer fleeing from justice?"

"Mr. Brewster, a man who could rob his own father, would not be deterred from the gratification of his selfish passions by any consideration of the wretchedness brought upon his victim."

"Mr. Creswell," said Charley, a little red in the face, "there have been facts developed that go to show that the world has been hasty in its judgment of Frederick Powell, and that he is not the sort of man you describe. I am not at liberty to explain further, but be assured the day will come when more than one will repent their inconsiderate condemnation of him."

"Mr. Brewster, there are people who will stand out in the face of demonstration. Your faith in him does more credit to your friendship than to your willingness to accept the truth. There is an illustration how he rewards the confidence placed in him."

And he pointed with bitterness at the note.

"I admit, sir, that this has a hateful look about it; and if he proves guilty of thus dragging her down with him, it will shake my confidence in him more than the murder, which I believe to have been done in a moment of passion and when smarting under a sense of injury."

"If he proves guilty! Mr. Brewster, I have no patience with you! Here are his own words!—but I suppose you doubt the fact of his gambling, though he confesses it to his father. You saw him drunk—that, at least, must be credible evidence."

"Mr. Creswell, we will not discuss the matter further, if you please; but I will enter immediately upon the search. The event will prove who is right."

Charley Brewster more than suspected where Fred had last seen Florence; so he rode directly to the glade. A little search revealed a place where a horse had been left standing, as indicated by the marks of his hoofs. Charley went down the bridge-path, and in the bower found a proof of her presence—her

handkerchief. With this he rode back to her uncle in gloomy thought.

There was a bitter smile on Mr. Creswell's lips as he received it.

"You still think him a paragon of uprightness and virtue," he sneered.

"Excuse me, Mr. Creswell. I am going home; but I do not abandon the search, nor shall I, until Frederick Powell is proved innocent or guilty of this dastardly act!"

The stern look on his brow and the suppressed emotion in his voice showed that even his confidence was shaken at last.

At home he found a note awaiting him. It ran:

"Come to me without delay. Eureka!"

"DRAPER."

These few words threw Charley into a fever of excitement. Leaping again on his horse, he rode at the top of his speed to the place where he knew he would find the detective.

Mr. Draper put his fingers on his lips, and in silence ushered his excited young friend into a room and secured the door.

"Have you found Fred?" was Charley's first breathless question.

"No."

"No?"

His face dropped in blank disappointment.

"But I have found something of vastly more importance," pursued the detective, rubbing his hands in satisfaction.

"What?" asked Charley, with renewed interest.

"A person worth twenty Freds to us, at this stage of the game," continued Draper, mysteriously.

"Whom, pray tell?"

"CECIL BEAUMONT!"

"What?"

"No less a person than Cecil Beaumont."

The detective was in an ecstasy of delight. Charley stared at him in blank bewilderment.

"Why, Cecil Beaumont is dead and buried!"

"Not a bit of it, my dear sir!"

"What do you say?"

"I said: 'Not a bit of it, my dear sir.' Didn't you understand me?" asked Draper, enjoying Charley's bewilderment.

"Yes, I understand you. But what do you mean?"

"That it is the easiest thing in the world to be mistaken."

"But I saw him with my own eyes. A score of friends saw him. Then I saw and recognized him again in his grave. There was no room for mistake."

"You are sure?"

"I am positive."

"Yet the features were mutilated."

"Yes, but not so as to affect immediate and unquestionable recognition of him."

"Mr. Brewster, if Frederick Powell was on trial before us now, could you swear to the identity of the body that was taken from Dead Man's Hole, and supposed to be that of Cecil Beaumont?"

"Without a shadow of hesitancy."

"Then he would not be the first innocent man whose life has been sworn away under a mistaken positiveness—that's all!"

The detective spoke with such assurance that Charley was staggered.

"Will you please to explain yourself?" he asked.

"The first instant that I set my eyes on the body lying out yonder in the graveyard, I knew that it was not the body of the man known to you as Cecil Beaumont."

"Known to us as Cecil Beaumont?" repeated Charley, inquiringly.

"That is not his real name; but excuse me from going into his early life."

"Well?"

"You doubtless noticed that I was very strongly affected at sight of the body?"

"I wondered at it somewhat."

"You saw me lift the hair from one of the temples?"

"Yes, and I discovered a scar beneath the hair."

"Did Cecil Beaumont have a scar on his temple?"

"Not that I ever knew of. I remember thinking of it at the time."

"Mr. Brewster, that was confirmatory evidence of what I recognized by other signs. Cecil Beaumont has no such scar on his temple. The body yonder in the graveyard is not his."

"Whose is it, then?"

"Excuse me; I cannot enlighten you yet. Enough that it is not Beaumont, and that I saw him last night in the flesh, alive and well."

"Mr. Draper, I can hardly credit your words. But if you knew both Beaumont and the man supposed to be him, and knew of their remarkable resemblance, it must be as you say."

"I have known both men for several years; and the mistake so nearly fatal to Frederick Powell was perfectly natural—indeed unavoidable. They were so nearly alike that their most intimate acquaintances would with difficulty have distinguished them, but for a scar which the mutilation hid."

"But how did it happen that this man, who so nearly resembles Cecil, was killed just at this time? And why has not Beaumont come forward and announced himself, to save an innocent man from the gallows?"

"To your first question, I reply that it is one of those inscrutable coincidences that sometimes happen in this world. With regard to your second question, I have my own thoughts. Time will prove whether they are correct. Until then, I say nothing. My immediate plan is to associate you with myself and several men whom I have already in my employ, and get possession of the man whom I know to be Cecil Beaumont."

"You may depend upon me, Mr. Draper, for all the assistance in my power, though I confess the whole thing is a puzzle to me," said the sorely-perplexed Brewster.

"I knew that I could count upon you. We start this evening at sunset."

"By the way, you may not have far to look for Fred. Of course you have heard of the disappearance of Miss Goldthorp?"

"No, I had not. When? And what has become of her?"

"She has been induced to abandon her home by Frederick Powell. If you can establish the identity

of the man whom you say we were all mistaken in, and produce the real Cecil Beaumont alive, it may not turn out so calamitously as I feared. But Frederick, by his own confession, believed himself a murderer; and when he induced her to join him in his flight, he thought that he was linking her to a felon, and making her life one long exile—an endless hiding from outraged justice. Such an act is inexcusable—it is a wrong without a palliation. I have always esteemed him as my friend. I would not have believed him capable of so dastardly an action. I am humiliated to have to say that I have been most sadly mistaken in him!"

"Well, Mr. Brewster, you have had your say; now let me have mine. Frederick Powell never had anything to do with the disappearance of Miss Goldthorp, and is at this moment as ignorant as he is innocent of it."

"But, sir, we have his own word for it. See! here is his letter. I forgot to return it to Mr. Creswell."

The detective glanced at the letter and smiled. "What do you think of this?" he asked, drawing a paper from his pocket and handing it to Charley. It read:

"A person answering the description of Frederick Powell was last night seen in this city. The matter did not come to the knowledge of the police until the man had again effected his escape. Prompt measures have been taken for a thorough search."

"That is a copy of a telegram received this morning from St. Louis," said Draper, watching Charley with a curious smile.

"Ah! but how easy to be mistaken in the identity of a person, where one has only a description to go by. The error which you ascribe to us, who have known the man for years, is ample illustration of my point."

"I admit that you have me there," laughed the detective; "yet I have every confidence in the telegram."

"But, my dear sir, his own writing," persisted Charley. And this letter must have been delivered yesterday, the very day on which you suppose him to have been hundreds of miles away."

Mr. Draper's eyes twinkled more merrily than ever, as Charley became earnest in the debate.

"Mr. Brewster," he said, "it seems to me very late in the day for you to yield your belief in humanity to the superficial appearance of things. Only a week ago you would not believe him guilty of forgery, though the suspicion rested upon precisely the same sort of evidence—what seemed to be his own handwriting."

"And do you mean to imply that this is not his writing?"

"Is it more likely than in the other case?"

Charley started with a new idea.

"And you say that Cecil Beaumont is alive—that you have seen him! What a fool I have been!"

"Not at all. It only goes to show that as soon as we begin to defend our opinions, we all of us become partisan."

"Mr. Draper, do you believe that Florence Goldthorp is in the hands of Cecil Beaumont?"

"From what you tell me, I have not the slightest doubt of it."

"My dear sir, she must be rescued, and that speedily! I shudder to think of her situation in his power!" cried Charley, earnestly, grasping the hand of the detective.

"She shall be released to-night."

"Not before? Why delay? Every moment must be an age of torture, and may see the consummation of a calamity that time cannot retrieve."

"We must risk it. I dare not move until after dark. Precipitancy now might lose her beyond recovery."

"But what prevents our going to her immediately?"

"I am under the constant espionage of Tiger Dick, through his emissary, Shadow Jim, a most accomplished spy, I must admit. He would make a king of detectives. I have to proceed with the utmost caution, for fear of flushing my covey. Having you call upon me in open daylight is a move to make them think that I have not my eye upon them, and do not know of their spying. If they should suspect that I was familiar with their covert, they would slit, and then where should I look for them again?"

"I wait," said Charley; "but it is with the most soul-harrowing forebodings."

CHAPTER IV.

THE TIGER RUNS TO COVER.

WHEN the news of Florence Goldthorp's disappearance reached Tiger Dick he first swore roundly and then sat down and pondered deeply. In this second step he proved himself a philosopher; for while the former proceeding was productive of no results, the latter eventually gave him the key to the whole mystery.

"Sent for by Fred Powell, and ran off with him—the number one!" he declared, decidedly. "Fred Powell ain't within hundreds of miles of this little burg, to my knowledge. But if Fred didn't, who did?—that's the question. Who is interested in Miss Florence Goldthorp, aside from Fred Powell and Tiger Dick?"

Then, as his thoughts became more concentrated, he ceased speaking. Gradually his lips set in harder and harder lines; a slumberous fire began to kindle in his eyes, his form began to dilate and tremble, until, at the culmination of the storm of passion, he brought his fist down on the table with a ringing blow that made everything on it leap, and burst into speech.

"Hah! Is the cat playing me false? I spared him once (when I thought it to my interest to do so), but if he nigs in this game, curse him! I'll let daylight through his traitor carcass on sight! Yet who but he could do this? Pah! he cares nothing for the yellow-haired baby to whom he is engaged, and he as good as told me, on our first meeting, that he loved this one. Curse my stupidity in what I said to him night before last! A man's a fool when he's drunk, anyway! This is the result of it."

"Well, old man," he continued, apostrophizing the absent object of his wrath, "you've got the deadwood on me this time; but if I don't make it hot for you next hand, just call me a flunk, or use my head for a football!"

He struck the table again, and leaping to his feet, began to pace the room.

At this moment the door opened and Shadow Jim entered.

"Hallo, boss! what's the row?" he asked, stopping on the threshold.

"Come in, Jim," said the Tiger, moodily.

"D'ye think it's perfectly safe?" asked Shadow Jim, teasingly. "I thought you was driving piles, by the noise. I don't know whether I want to trust myself alone with you, unless you think you are in a harmless state. What would my friends say, if they was to come in here and find the late lamented Jim all chawed up? Let me tell you that would be a very melancholy occasion—for Jim!"

No one could manage the Tiger, when in a rage, so well as Shadow Jim; and now his look of mock inquiry and apprehension and seriousness restored the irate gambler to good humor.

"Stow chaff, and come in and shut the door, Jim," he said. "Here is something that will reassure you, I know."

And he pushed a decanter across the table.

"Accepted!" cried Jim, with alacrity; and kicking to the door, he, to use his own expression, "waltzed up to the little lovey and brushed the dew from her sweet lips."

"And now," said the Tiger, "You have heard of this disappearance of Miss Goldthorp?"

"Pard, I have!"

"And do you believe that Fred Powell has had a hand in it?"

For answer Shadow Jim pulled down the corner of his eye, without removing his lips from the mouth of the bottle, at which he was also "pulling."

"Whom do you spot?"

"Cash!" was the laconic reply.

"My man!" cried the Tiger, with vindictive fire in his eyes. "Jim, we've got to put a hole in him, and hang him up somewhere to drain."

"And we've got a furlough to do it in," said Jim.

"Eh? What do you mean?"

"That we've took all the tricks we're goin' to git in this game. We've got to pull up stakes and light out for another clearin', or we'll git bagged, sure."

"What's in the wind now?"

"Why, that sharp from the East (and not so much from the East, either, accordin' to my calculation) has got jest the 'cutest lottle game put up on us that you ever see!—I mean Billy Saunderson's bosom friend. It ain't the first time he's held the ribbons, old boss, now I can tell ye! He's only waiting to git the pins all in a row—and he'll git 'em there, pard! he'll git 'em there, if we don't step out o' line mighty lively—and then he'll rake 'em in, body and breeches! There won't be no mourners; you can bet your bottom red on that!"

"And when does he propose to call the board?"

asked Tiger Dick.

"Who's to be our next President?" responded Shadow Jim, indicating by his reply that he had no means of judging when the detective would move.

"Look a-here, pard," said the Tiger, an ugly look coming into his eyes, "if this sharp goes to bucking against me, he'll find that I wasn't kicked up hill and down dale in the mountains for fifteen years to be scared out by a flat in the States. I should hate awfully to turn tail, Jim, and we don't learn to crawl out in the diggin's."

"It's a knowin' sharp that cries quits when he's beat, Dick."

"But who says we're beat?" persisted the Tiger.

"Why, look at the run o' the cards yourself. There's no chance o' gitlin' anything more than we've got already; you're booked for pulling the bank; and the rest of us will be dancin' on nothing for taking moonlight strolls on Dead Man's Bluff, the first thing we know. I tell ye, that sharp has handled jest as cunning fellers as you and me in his day. Anyway he can play jest as lively music as we want to jig to, or I lose my guess."

"Well, there's nothing to stay for, as you say, and we've got to lay for the Prince; so I guess that ends the matter."

"By the way, I done a little runnin' around before I came in, and found out that Pat Donovan's hack and Pat Donovan's precious self are out of town."

"Which means the Prince and Goldthorp?"

"Nothing else."

"I suppose there's no use in our goin' to that hole in the ground? Of course he's made off with the sachel."

"Being a cashier, it would come natural for him to look after the rhino, you know," replied Shadow Jim, with a wink and a grin. "When you find him, you'll find that he has froze to it, take my word."

"Well, here goes!" said the Tiger, rising from the table briskly.

He and his satellite then made a toilet that would have struck an observer as very remarkable. While apparently dressed in simple walking suits, they had secreted about their persons disguises enough to puzzle a whole police force. With a last look about the room, they passed out, locking the door; and half an hour afterward, had any person presented himself at "The Jungle" for Tiger Dick and Shadow Jim, he would have had to look for them with very little prospect of success.

That night Charley Brewster, the detective and his men floated down the Mississippi, and then struck off into the country, until they came to a rocky waste. Here, after much careful maneuvering, the detective introduced his men into a cave; and all their wariness and caution were rewarded by an opportunity to stand and look at each other and at the bare rock walls, by the light of dark-lanterns.

Then, with a flush on his cheek, the detective uttered the one word:

"Sold!"

And, turning upon his heel, he walked silently out, followed in like silence by the others.

On their return to town one of the party was dispatched to "The Jungle," and returned with the intelligence that although the bar was running, with the ever-smiling Duff behind it, the door of the gambling saloon bore the inscription:

"PLAYED OUT!"

Then the detective sat drawing parallel lines, making them of the same length with the nearest exactness, as a man will give himself to some trivial occupation, when some elaborate and carefully-laid scheme has come to naught.

"Mr. Brewster," he said, in a quiet tone of voice,

"everything is down. I must begin to build again from the bottom. The game is down, and all the world is before me to find them in."

And Charley, thinking of the awful peril that threatened Florence in the time that must be lost, and of the impossibility of proving Fred's innocence, should he be found, said:

"God help her and him!"

CHAPTER V.

A FIENDISH DEED.

WE now return to pick up a thread of the warp of our fabric, which has for some time been running beneath the surface.

When Frederick Powell and Cecil Beaumont met on Dead Man's Bluff, the sense of deep injury in the breast of the former broke forth in bitter accusation and invective. The hatred of the latter needed but a breath to fan it into a flame, and the two soon came to blows.

It chanced that neither was armed, Cecil having left his pistol at the bank; so that both were forced to rely upon their skill in pugilism. In this they were pretty well matched, and the conflict was of doubtful issue.

But, as they neared the verge of the precipice, Cecil tripped on a vine and fell backward, but at the same time struck Fred on the head with a stone, which he had picked up, bringing him insensible to the ground.

When Fred recovered his senses he crept to the verge and looked over, seeing where Cecil had clutched at the shrubs in his descent, pulling them out by the roots. Listening he heard nothing but the beating of the waves at the base of the bluff and the mournful sighing of the freshening wind in the tree-tops. Chilled with horror at the deed of which he supposed himself guilty, he leaned out over the abyss and called in a terrified voice:

"Cecil! Cecil!"

All the animosity died out of his breast, at thought that his rival lay lifeless in the depths of Dead Man's Hole, hurled there by his hand.

With bated breath and heart stilled in its beating he waited and listened. But there was no sound save the sobbing of the waves and the sighing of the wind.

Then an awful horror seized him; an agony of fear turned the current of his blood to ice; and, staggering to his feet, he fled the accursed place.

But Cecil Beaumont was not dead. As he felt himself going over the escarpment he clutched at the roots, but they gave way, and with a dizzy sense of horror he felt himself going down, down, down as he supposed to death in the seething waters below. But suddenly he felt his fall arrested. Then, blinded by the dirt and stones that followed him, and half-insensible from the concussion, he found himself on a shelf of rock that ran along the face of the cliff.

Getting upon his feet, he made his way along the ledge until he reached a point where he could climb up the bank. He then started toward town, passing near the landing. At this point he suddenly came upon a group of men. Two were kneeling on either side of a prostrate man, searching his pockets, and the fifth was holding a dark lantern.

At Cecil's approach the ruffian dropped the lantern, and, leaping over the body, aimed a blow at Cecil with a club which he held in his hand.

"Hold up, McFarland!" cried the cashier, leaping aside; "you have nothing to fear from me."

The others had sprung up and surrounded Cecil with drawn knives.

"Who the devil be you?" demanded McFarland, suspiciously.

"You have dogged my footsteps enough to know me by this time," said Cecil, a little bitterly.

"Blowed if it ain't that lank skap for whom Tiger Dick has conceived such an affection of late," said a voice, which we recognize as belonging to Shadow Jim, though Cecil had never heard it before.

"Be the powers, but it's that same!" corroborated O'Toole.

"What air ye hangin' around here fur?" demanded McFarland, with surliness.

"That won't interest you. But you may have a looker-on in your little game, if you don't dispose of that body."

"What do you mean?"

"That there's a sport just up there on the bluff that may drop down on you at any moment."

"I'll take care of him," said Shadow Jim. "Whistle when yer ready to start."

And he glided off toward the crown of the bluff.

"Whom have you got here?" asked Cecil, approaching the prostrate and motionless form.

"A flat as we've given the finishin' touch to, I'm afeard," said McFarland.

Again the lantern was turned up on his face.

"He is in disguise," said Cecil; and stooping, he pulled a set of false whiskers from the man's face.

At the first glance he uttered a sharp cry and sprang backward, nearly overturning O'Toole. McFarland, too, uttered a cry. His was of surprise simply, but Cecil's had the ring of terror in it.

"Dog my cats, if he ain't jest the picter o' yerself, captain," said McFarland, gazing first at the man and then at Cecil in astonishment and wonder.

Trembling in every limb, Cecil Beaumont again drew near. But his face was white and bloodless as that of the man lying motionless and apparently dead before him. There was in his eyes a wild glitter of horror and superstitious dread.

"Can it be he?" he whispered, to himself, while McFarland and O'Toole looked on with mouths agape.

Then, with a shudder: "Is he dead? See if he is dead. I dare not touch him," addressing McFarland, with chattering teeth.

The ruffian stooped down and unceremoniously thrust his hand beneath the vest of the prostrate man.

"Dead as a nit," he replied, without show of concern. "I hit him for keeps, you bet! was he any relation o' yours?"

"No—no relation," said Cecil, but his tones and manner belied his words.

Then a sudden reaction took place. A sort of fierce satisfaction came into his face, as he said:

"Well, he's dead now, and not by my hand. He could have followed me for but one purpose. There is one less dog at my heels."

"He'll never trouble nobody after this," said McFarland.

"Let's pitch the spalpeen into the drink," suggested O'Toole. "He'll tell no tales then." "That's the safest place fur him," assented McFarland. "Bear a hand, and in he goes!" "Wait!" cried Cecil, breathlessly. "Does he look just like me? Look sharp, and see if there is any point of difference."

"As like as two buttons, only fur that scar on his lip," replied McFarland, after a critical comparison.

"Hair, eyes, everything?" asked Cecil. "Look close, for everything may depend upon some slight dissimilarity."

"Yer own mother wouldn't know ye apart, if you had a scar like his, or he was without," affirmed McFarland, positively.

"St. Puther himself wouldn't know t'other from which, if wan war a saint and the other a devil," corroborated O'Toole.

"Look here, men, you ain't either of you squeamish on little points, when there's money to be made?"

"Throy us on wanet!" cried O'Toole, with a wink. McFarland scratched the palm of his hand significantly.

"If you will pound his face with that club until that scar cannot be detected, it will be ten dollars in each of your pockets."

McFarland grasped the club eagerly, and spitting on his hands, brandished it, but paused.

"And Shadow Jim—we can't leave him out."

"Ten for him, too," said Cecil, drawing out his pocketbook.

"I'll mash him till his own mother wouldn't know him!" cried McFarland, and immediately began a rain of blows.

"Stop! stop!" cried Cecil, catching the arm of the too-zealous ruffian. You will mutilate him beyond recognition. I don't want that."

"Oh, I see. You want him to be taken fur you? Well, that lay is too deep fur me."

"Never mind bothering your head about it. I'll tell you all I want you to know. Here's your money. And now pitch him into the water."

The ruffians took up the body between them, swung it back and forth two or three times, and then tossed it out over the dark waters of Dead Man's Hole.

There was a dull splash, the waters spurted aside and then closed again over the body, leaping high over the spot where it went down. Shuddering, Cecil Beaumont covered his face with his hands, to shut out the horrible sight.

There was a moment of awful suspense, and then there came to them on the wind a voice husky with terror.

"Cecil! Cecil!" Cecil Beaumont reeled and fell to the ground, groveling at the roots of a tree. For one moment of agonizing fear he thought that the voice came from the body which had just sunk from sight. Then his reason prevailed over his superstition, and he found voice to ask:

"Did you hear it? Where did it come from?" "Up the bluff," replied McFarland. "Shouldn't wonder if it came from the cuss what you spoke about. But he'd better keep mum, or Shadow Jim'll cut off his wind."

Then there was a sound of some one rushing madly through the bushes.

"Guess he's seen somethin' what skeered him," suggested McFarland, "and skeddaddled."

A moment afterward Shadow Jim glided in among them.

"What's the row?" asked McFarland.

"Who called?" asked Cecil, with a face as ghastly as that of a corpse.

"'Twas your friend," replied Shadow Jim. "He looked over the bank and called, as if huntin' fer you. Then he got up and run like a white-head. Looked as if the devil and all his angels was after him."

"He thinks that he has murdered me. That's just what I want; and others must think so before to-morrow night."

"I don't jest twig you," said Shadow Jim, curiously.

"Never mind. Come on now, and I will explain when I have matured my plans. Here is ten dollars for you, as compensation for a little service rendered by McFarland."

"Put it there, pard!" said Shadow Jim; and he grasped Cecil's hand along with the money, and gave it a shake. "Plums don't often drop inter a feller's mouth like that."

"Come on, or we will be caught in the storm. I have a boat here at the landing, and we can go in that. Throw that club into the bushes, where it can easily be found. And now come on, and I will unfold my plans as we go along. I have work for all of you."

They followed him to the landing, and leaping into the boat, dropped down-stream. Then came the storm, with its rush and fury, lashing the water into foam, and drenching them with rain and spray.

CHAPTER VI.

A BLACK PLOT.

"CAN'T we get protection from the storm?" asked Cecil, as a blinding deluge of rain was blown into his face.

"There's a place a little further down the stream," said McFarland, tugging away at the oars; "but we'll be drowned rats afore we get there."

Five minutes' rowing brought them to the place, and the boat glided under a tree that hung over the river, supporting a mass of grape-vines, trailing to the very water. Here they found a comparative shelter.

"Take something to keep out the wet and cold, men," said Cecil, producing a flask.

"You're my mutton!" exclaimed McFarland, eagerly, snatching it from his hand and turning it bottom upward, with his lips glued to the mouth.

"Now, hog!" protested Shadow Jim; "remember that you hain't got the trough all to yourself."

"Be jabers, but it looks loike it, at prisent!" exclaimed O'Toole; and added, tremulous with anxiety: "For the love o' God, don't let him swally the whole bottle! Jist a drop o' the craythur, to wet the tip o' me tongue, and the blissed saints reward ye!"

Shadow Jim snatched the flask out of the hands of McFarland, who struggled to catch his breath after

the long draught, all the time looking reproachfully at the interrupter of his bliss.

He in turn elevated the flagon, and with eyes closed in an ecstasy of enjoyment, let the liquor run down his throat.

O'Toole looked on a moment in constantly heightening solicitude; then, overcome, he burst forth:

"Howdy Mother! he'll suck the bottom out av it! To waste the potheen on such a baste av a guzzler! Let up! let up, as ye hope fur reminbrance in the day o' need!"

With both hands he seized the flask and sought to dispossess Shadow Jim. This sybarite in guzzling only opened his eyes and frowned at him deprecatingly and menacingly.

O'Toole, who stood somewhat in awe of Shadow Jim, drew back; but at last his love of the "craythur" made him desperate, and he snatched the flask and clapped it to his mouth in a twinkling.

Shadow Jim, who had gone off into a sort of trance, now came back to earth with a sigh, and glanced at O'Toole with a smile of malicious satisfaction.

A look of keen disappointment passed over O'Toole's face, and he removed the flask from his lips. He shook it, but no swish of liquid came forth. He gazed ruefully in at the mouth, and said:

"Divil a drop! bad luck to yez fur murderin' thafe o' the worruld!"

And he returned the flagon to Cecil with a sorrowful shake of the head, while McFarland and Shadow Jim laughed at his discomfiture, in which Cecil was fain to join.

"And now, gents," said Cecil, "do you know of any good hiding-place, where a man could lie away for a week or two, without danger of discovery?"

"You're right, sport. We can tuck you away in our treasury, where you can snooze away until the day of judgment, and nary visitor will stick in his nose to ax the time o' day."

"Your treasury?"

"Where we stowed the spondulicks."

"The money taken from the bank?"

"That's what I said."

"And where's this place?"

"Down-river. On the Mississippi. We've got a snug little hole down there."

"And can you go to it to-night?"

"There's where we're bound for."

"The storm has slackened up. Let's be on the move."

"Narry move yet."

"And why?"

"Don't want to run my head into a sling, fur one."

"I don't understand you."

"We can't get by town without gittin' spied. 'Ll have to wait until the lights is off the river."

Cecil saw the force of McFarland's words, and they waited patiently where they were until after midnight. Then they dropped quietly down the river and into the Mississippi. Several miles from the confluence of the rivers the boat was brought to shore, and all debarked.

A walk of half a mile, down a valley that set in at right angles with the river, brought them to a wild, rocky region, where the bluffs rose perpendicularly. Here McFarland led the way to a cave, whose entrance was hidden by vines that clambered up the face of the cliff.

Once within, they soon had a bright fire burning, and removing their clothes, hung them up to dry.

"And now," said Cecil, "tell me how you came across the stranger whom we left at Dead Man's Hole?"

"Well, boss," said Shadow Jim, "I guess that's as much my funeral as anybody's. I spotted that flat this afternoon, when we found that we needn't hunt our holes on account o' droppin' on the bank last night. I found out 'at he were stopping in an out-o'-the-way place, an' nobody knowed nothin' about him, excepting he called himself John Smith. I accidentally seen him pull a pocket-book pretty well lined with greenbacks, and thought they was as good for us as fur him. We shadred him out to the bluff to-night, expectin' to take the rocks out o' his pockets an' let him go. But Mack allers was an impetuous cuss; an' in poppin' him over, he hit him a lick what sent him to kingdom-come. An' that's the hui story."

Cecil shuddered.

"What's a man widout money, colleens?" asked O'Toole. "Bedad, he's out o' his trouble, an' will slape as swately in Did Man's Hole as at Widdy McCarty's."

"An' now what's your game, sport?" asked Shadow Jim of Cecil.

"Well, men, it must be pretty clear to you that I have no love for the man that knocked me over the bluff to-night, and came mighty near settling my accounts. If the body of the man whom you pitched into the drink is found and taken for me, and the man with whom I had the fight is convicted of murdering me and hanged, you'll admit that that will be some on the revenge."

"That's so, pard. But the kid is the son of a banker what's got the skads to pay, if we did lighten his coffers some. He can tickle the palms of lawyers, and they'll muddle the whole thing up, until nobody can make head or tail of it. Then they'll let it lay over, till everybody has forgotten that you ever died. Then he'll light out o' the country. There won't be much satisfaction in that."

"But we mustn't let lawyers have anything to do with it."

"What's trumps, pard?" asked Jim, meaning to indicate that he did not understand.

"When that thing's fished up with the face all stove in, there will be a lot that'll think it a pretty dirty job," said Cecil.

"That's so, old boss!"

"What would a crowd do with us, if they caught us, and knew that we did it?"

"They'd hang us up to dry, I reckon, without any prayin' or palaverin'."

"It isn't any harder to hang a rich man than a poor one, is it? And such a crowd wouldn't care about his money."

"Jest whisper patent leathers to 'em, and every man 'u'd want to have a holt o' the rope."

"That's just it," said Cecil, with a fiendish smile. "I am missed. Some one has seen me get into a boat. Search is made on the river, and my hat is found. It fell off my head when I tumbled over the bluff. Then the spot where I came across you fellows is found. The rain won't have washed out the

blood-stain, for the spot is sheltered by the trees. Foul play is suspected. Some one swears that he saw Fred Powell running away from the bluff scared to death."

"Hold on, pard. You don't think I'm fool enough to run my head into such a sling as that, do you? Swear to nothin'! They'd ask me what I was doin' out there that time o' the night."

"You're not the only man in the world that likes money, Mr. Jim. Don't you suppose I've got money enough to manufacture a witness; such a one, anyway, as will answer before Judge Lynch's court?"

"Oh! Now I begin to twig you," said Jim. "Detl away."

"My witness says that he saw Powell running away, and I gave him marks enough to show that he has been in a fight—"

"Better'n that, Cap. His bat's somewhere up there in the woods."

"How so?"

"He was bareheaded when I seen him skeddaddlin'."

"That's capital! Oh, we've got him! His bat is found and identified. Then they find the body with the face pummeled to a jelly. Somebody makes a speech to the crowd. They go for Mr. Fred, and set him to dancing on nothing!"

"My dear Mr. Beaumont, that's a pretty high old plot, and you're a pretty high old sharp. How long have you been in the business?" asked Shadow Jim, in admiration.

"Since before your eyeteeth were cut, my bantam!" said Cecil, impressively. "But that ain't all. Of course I don't want to live in retirement all the days of my life."

"Oh, they'll have you planted up in the lone-yard, you know," laughed Shadow Jim.

"Whurroo! an' he'll be all the day spoilin' potheen in some sly corner, the devil!" cried O'Toole, enjoying the situation.

"How air you going to resurrect?" asked McFarland.

"Easy enough. He is hanged to-morrow. You take me a hundred miles or so down the river, and leave me bound and gagged near some farm-house. In the morning I am found. I lie sick and out of my head for two or three days from injuries received. Then I tell my story, which runs this wise: I was fighting with Powell and he knocked me over the bluff. I fetched up on the ledge, and walked until I came to the spot where I saw you fellows. There I saw two strapping big ruffians with bushy beards. (None of you are very big, nor have any of you full whiskers.) These kids have killed a man, and stove in his face with a club. Seeing that I have discovered them, they pop me over with a thwack on the head—and, Lord knows, I've got bumps enough to bear out this part of my story! The next thing I know I am bound and gagged, lying in the bottom of a boat. The sharps fly by night and hide during the day. When they get down the Mississippi they leave me bound and gagged and make off. I am exposed all night, and wake up in a fever."

"Who's going to find any fault with that? Powell is dead, but I couldn't prevent it. I don't know anything about it, you see, until, after I tell my story, the farmer tells me that a body was found, supposed to be mine, and Powell was strung up by Judge Lynch. Of course, I'm awful sorry. If I did fight with him, I was a good friend to him for all that. Do you think that will wash?"

"Pard, I guess that'll wash! Let's see; is it first or second cousin to the devil that you claim to be?" asked Shadow Jim.

CHAPTER VII.

WHO WILL GET HER?

THE fiendish plot of Cecil Beaumont had been carried into execution. In the fisherman, who, while accredited with but little wit, was really possessed of no small degree of cunning, Shadow Jim found a witness, who, under his tuition, soon had a very plausible story, true in every particular save the one of his having seen the events described. The roustabout, being that morning thrown out of employment, was nothing loth to fortify himself at Tiger Dick's bar, and then "finger the rhino," as he expressed it, meaning receive pay, for simply following the bent of his nature and engaging in an exploit in which he would have been a volunteer in any event.

But an unforeseen contingency had arisen. Fred Powell had been delivered out of the murderous hands of Judge Lynch.

It was not until the next day that Shadow Jim could communicate with Tiger Dick. He left Cecil's letter with Jimmy Duff; and upon his release from jail and the receipt of the letter, Dick sent for his allies.

"Look a-here, sports," said Dick, "somehow or other this strikes me as a pretty sharp game. If our gay young cavalier don't make a clean sweep, he'll fetch up in Tophet—that's my opinion. What do you think about it?"

"I guess we all foller suit, pard," said Shadow Jim. "But as near as I can make out, we've got to make one more try. It won't do to let our bird go with only a few tail-feathers plucked out."

"That's so," assented the Tiger, meditatively.

"We've got to sink him, or knock under ourselves," pursued Shadow Jim. "If they see the horns o' the gentle cashier sticking out o' this last dodge, it'll make 'em kinder shaky on the other hands that he's played."

"That ain't no lie, Shady," said the Tiger. "If they get to thinking that maybe the cashier has stocked the cards, they'll want something more than his say-so on the forgery business. The whole thing'll go to smash if they begin to doubt the cashier while young Powell is alive."

"Knowin' which, what is as plain as the nose on your face?" asked Jim, pointedly.

"Humph!" said the Tiger, "we've got to rule him out, by hook or by crook."

"Them's my sentiments, cap. But how air ye goin' to do it?"

Tiger Dick was thoughtful for a moment, and then spoke.

"The cashier keeps shady for a little while."

"Yes. Well?"

"There's a price out on Powell; but we don't want nobody to earn that reward."

"'Twon't do to let the thing git into the hands o' the lawyers."

"You're a-whistlin'! But if the thing is held over

him, and he is run off somewhere, and nobody ever hears of him again, that's jest the size of our pile, ain't it?"

"Recorded! Go on."

"Then the cashier can break cover, and search be made for the victim of a fatal mistake, and all that sort of thing, but nothing will come of it. And everything will be lovely, with the goose at its wonted elevation."

"Reads like a play; but how is it to be done?"

"A couple of sharps that wear McFarland's and O'Toole's size of boots find the fugitive, dog him from pillar to post, and make him think that all the world is on the *qui vive* to get their claws on that particular reward. He runs to cover and keeps mighty close. Whenever he shows his head, they are on hand to shove a poster under his nose. When he gets away where nobody will know anything about him, he suddenly quits the stage and the curtain drops."

"Anything at all to turn an honest penny," said O'Toole, rubbing his hands briskly.

This was the project that was carried out, and Fred Powell was run to earth by his implacable foe. But it took more than a week to do it; and in that time McFarland and O'Toole held no communication with their allies, because of being constantly on the move, and knew nothing of incidents that were occurring at home.

On the morning after his interview and sworn friendship with Mr. Draper, Billy Saunderson entered the presence of Tiger Dick with a very doleful look on his face.

"Pard," he said, "the game's gone up—smashed—played—busted!"

The "decoy duck" had thrown himself astride a chair, with his arms resting along the back and supporting his chin. His hat was tilted on the back part of his head, his eyes rested on the floor, and the corners of his mouth drooped. Altogether he was about as crestfallen an individual as one need wish to see. His own words, perhaps, describe him most accurately: "Gone up—smashed—played—busted!"

Tiger Dick was puzzled whether to laugh or look grave.

"You ain't drunk, Billy?" he asked, looking at him curiously.

"Narry drunk!" affirmed Billy, in the same dejected tone.

"What's the row, then?"

"I told you, we're laid on the shelf—cleaned out—scooped! The enemy can double-discount us, give us points, let us count our own game, and then flax us all to thunder!"

"Stop shuffling the cards under the table, and perhaps we'll find out what we're playing for."

"Cap, the black-eyed Peri, as you call her, has blocked our game."

"How so?"

"She and Brewster has put their heads together, and got some sharp from foreign parts to back 'em, and they know our hand by heart. I heard the strange sharp showing it up to Brewster last night, and he read it off like a book."

"The deuce you did. What have they found out?"

"The whole bill. He told me things that I didn't know. Boss, he played a dirty trick on me last night. He showed up as if he was a New York sharp and won my confidence. I confess I showed myself a flat; but he knowed so much more than I did already that I couldn't tell him nothing."

"Did you tell him anything?" asked the Tiger, with an ominous frown.

"I didn't tell him nothing about that key business; I'll swear to that. But he got me mellow, and after he had bragged about the dodges he'd been up to in New York, I was fool enough to try to call him. I told him that I had showed lots of fellows the elephant, and Fred Powell among the number. That's all I said about this case, so help me!"

"Did you tell him that you drugged Fred's wine?"

"I was jest fool enough to tell him that; I don't deny it. But, afterward, I found that he had been stuffing me, and laid for him at Brewster's house, and heard him at parting talk the whole thing off as straight as a string—the forgery and key and all. They'd clap Beaumont into the jug, as sure as a gun, if he wasn't in the bone-yard."

Tiger Dick then questioned the "decoy duck" in detail, and saw the storm that hung above Cecil, should it be discovered that he was not dead. This unexpected turn of events effectually precluded the return of the cashier to his home. Nothing but the belief that Fred was a murderer prevented an exposition of the whole plot.

Tiger Dick went that night in a very reckless mood to the cave where Cecil was in hiding.

"Well, the game's up, pard, at last," he said. "You've got to stay up in the bone-yard, and I'll have to take a change of air for my health. If you was to stick your nose out of this hole in the ground, they'd clap you into Castle Cross-bar before you could say 'Jack Robinson!' and as quick as they get over this search for young Powell, they'll make the place too hot for me. Hence, I seek new fields and pastures green; in other words, I vamose the ranch—obsequiously—slope—git!"

Cecil saw that the Tiger had been drinking, and heavily, too; for it was an unusual thing for him to be thrown off his balance. He learned all that Billy Saunderson had told the Tiger, and more that had been gathered by Shadow Jim. He saw that all his plots were laid bare, and that his reappearance before the world would be the signal for an arraignment that would eventuate in his incarceration in a felon's cell. He had played a hazardous game, and lost all—all but this last point. At least he had crushed his rival. Fred could not long elude the pursuit of McFarland and O'Toole; or, failing there, the gallows awaited him at the hands of the law. And at the thought Cecil Beaumont set his teeth and chuckled with fiendish joy. In those few moments a marked change had come over him. Cut off from a return to the world in his proper character, a wild recklessness came into his look and air that had not appeared there before.

"I say, pard," pursued the Tiger, breaking in upon his thoughts, "that black-eyed angel's a clipper; by Jove, she is! Fate never meant her to be thrown away on such a bloke as Powell. No, sir! It'll take a man of genius to be a fit mate for her. What do you think of your humble servant? Tiger Dick, *alias*

King Monte, of Yellow sand Gulch, and everywhere else in the diggings, California?"

He thrust his thumbs through the armholes of his vest, and leaning back, favored Cecil with a drunken leer.

A wild gleam of hatred and jealousy leaped into Cecil Beaumont's eyes; but he hid it beneath the drooping lids, and pushed the decanter toward the Tiger. Dick poured out some liquor, and said confidentially:

"The first day I got a squint at her pretty face, I made up my mind that that flat shouldn't hold a hand in that game. She gave me her hand like a princess, and that was my first lesson in the grand passion. I've seen a good many pretty women, but I never was set aloft in Paradise before. Boss, that girl's going to run off with a soldier—see if she don't—and I'm that soldier!"

When the Tiger had taken his leave, Cecil ground his teeth in rage, and shook his fist in the direction of the mouth of the cave.

"We'll see who gets her!" he said, with a look of iron determination.

Then he disguised himself, and leaving the cave, followed Tiger Dick to the city. Here he went to a cabman, whom he knew money would make blind, deaf and dumb. Of him he engaged a carriage, to be in readiness on the following night. Then he produced a saddle-horse; and when he returned with him just before the break of dawn, the animal was reeking with sweat, showing that he had been ridden hard all night.

Cecil then wrote the note which Florence supposed to be from her lover, and secured its delivery by a broken-down theater actor.

"We'll see who gets her!" he muttered again, as he repaired to the cave.

CHAPTER VIII.

AN ABDUCTION.

WHEN he entered the cave, Cecil Beaumont had before him one of the most trying days of his life; a day in which his breast was a prey to successive ecstasies of love, hate and anxiety. Everything being in readiness for the execution of his last and crowning plot, he had but to await the time, with his thoughts as his only companions.

"That is the way with them," he said, thinking of his relations with May; "they will lavish their affections upon some cuss like me, when they wouldn't give an honest man a second look. I pity her; for she loves me, as few can. But the rose outblooms the dandelion, and the moon pales before the noonday sun. Oh, heavens! if she would come to me of her own free will! If she would lay her cheek to mine, and call me 'Cecil!'"

He clasped his hands over his face, and shook from head to foot at the thought.

"But no; she will hate me. She will curse me with her every breath. Be it so. I could not live and know that she was in the power of that fiend, Tiger Dick. Ah! how well he is named! But I will save her from him, if she makes every moment of my life a burning hell with her scorn."

Then his thoughts took another turn.

"Sixty thousand dollars!" he said. "She shall be a queen while it lasts, whatever may follow. I will lavish upon her all that money can buy. Oh! that I could buy one moment of love! But no. Gilding her chains will only make them the more galling. Oh, Florence! how I love you! And yet I am going to bring upon your life such a blight as only a fiend could meditate!"

With such thoughts he passed the day, and at the approach of night, as indicated by his watch, he went into one of the galleries that ramified from the main cave, lighting his way with a pine knot. At its furthest extremity, he dug down into the sand that had been collected by the action of water, and drew forth the sachel in which Tiger Dick had placed the money taken from the bank. Then he returned to the main chamber and stole forth into the night.

A walk of an hour brought him to a road, where he took up a position behind a large oak. Within twenty minutes a carriage approached from the direction of the Mississippi, and as it neared the spot, the driver began to whistle a popular air, and slackened the pace of his horse. At this signal Cecil stepped boldly out into the road; the carriage stopped; he leaped in, and was whirled rapidly away.

It would be vain to attempt to describe the emotions of Cecil Beaumont, as he stood in the little bower at the side of the bridle-path leading from Griggs's Hollow, awaiting the coming of the woman he most deeply loved—the woman against whom he meditated an irreparable wrong. With clammy hands and fevered brow he stood shaking as with an ague. Then a light step came down the path. It sounded hurried; and he could imagine how wildly her heart was beating with hope and love and fear.

He took a step forward with a swimming, dizzy sensation—a wild ecstasy of exultation and love and terror. She saw him and sprung toward him with a rippling, tremulous cry:

"Fred! oh, Fred! how glad I—"

He felt her arms go about his neck. Their touch was like fire, and thrilled him to the heart. He clasped her in a frenzied embrace. He felt her breath on his cheek. All his soul went into his lips to receive that one kiss, glowing with the fervor of her mighty love. But in that moment a thrill of agonizing fear, a shiver of loathing and horror, shot through her frame; she gave a frantic wrench to free herself, and struck him full on the mouth with her hand. Caught like a bird in the coils of a serpent, her heart seemed to leap from her throat in one wild shriek of terror, and then she sunk limp and lifeless in his arms.

With hurried step, Cecil carried her out to the road. The carriage drove up and a man leaped out. As if by previous understanding, he mounted Florence's horse and dashed away. Then Cecil entered the carriage, the driver whipped his horses, and they flew over the ground, bearing Florence Goldthorp from her home to an unknown fate.

It was hours before Florence Goldthorp awoke from that deathlike swoon, and then the first gray streaks of dawn were appearing in the east. At first she was only dimly conscious of the rocking motion of a carriage. Then she knew that some one was holding her hand and looking anxiously into her face.

"Thank God that you have recovered at last! I

feared that I had lost you," said a voice that sounded far away.

It sent a thrill through her frame, she struggled back into consciousness, and all the terrible reality burst upon her. With a cry of loathing and horror, she snatched away her hand and shrunk into the corner of the carriage.

Cecil Beaumont leaned back and covered his face with his hands.

With a sudden spring Florence clutched the handle of the door, intending to throw herself out. Cecil caught her and forced her gently, yet firmly back into her seat.

"You can but recognize the futility of any attempt to escape," he said. "I do not intend to harm you, but I must not be thwarted in my purpose. I shall resort to only such measures of restraint as are rendered necessary by your deportment."

She glanced out of the window. She saw only a desolate wilderness on every side.

"If you should scream, there is no one to hear you," he said, divining her thought.

"Who are you?" she asked, peering at him through the gloom; for there seemed something familiar in his voice.

For answer he removed the false whiskers and glasses. Florence started violently, and then leaned forward in a close scrutiny.

"Mr. Beaumont!" she whispered, with superstitious terror in her voice.

"The same, and in the flesh," he replied, with a smile.

She passed her hand across her forehead in a dazed way. She could not believe the evidence of her senses. Yet there he sat before her, his form, his face, his voice.

"Mr. Beaumont!" she repeated to herself. "Alive!—can it be, alive?"

"Never more so," he replied, in an off-hand way.

"And you were not killed at Dead Man's Bluff? But they buried Cecil Beaumont!"

"That's when they fooled themselves. Did you never see two men much alike?"

"Then Frederick is not a murderer!"

She trembled from head to foot with the idea. Cecil Beaumont only smiled.

"Why did you not appear and clear him from that dreadful charge?" she demanded, suddenly.

"For reasons," was the laconic reply; but the gleam of hatred that convulsed his face told more than words could have.

A chilling terror took possession of her as she slowly evolved the truth in her mind, and she next demanded in a husky tone:

"Why have you stolen me from my home?"

"Because I love you."

She shuddered.

"And what do you purpose to do with me?"

"Marry you!" he replied, in a thrilling tone, gazing at her with a strange mingling of pain with love and exultant anticipation.

She affected to laugh at him, but a shiver ran through her frame.

"Marry me?" she repeated; "and who will you get to perform such a ceremony? I have but to denounce your villainy, and be free from you."

"The minister whom I have employed will be deaf to your appeals."

She shuddered and looked terrified.

"Do not fear," he went on, divining her thought, "but that he is a regularly ordained clergyman; for I love you truly, and am determined to make you in reality my wife; but money is his only god."

"But I will never consent. I will make no responses. I will spurn you. Such a mummery will not have a shadow of legality about it."

"Oh, yes it will, if you subsequently acknowledge it."

"But I will never acknowledge it. I loathe you; I abhor you; I will denounce you at the first opportunity. No, I would die a thousand deaths before I would acknowledge so loathsome a bond."

"You may be glad to," was all he replied.

A shiver ran through her frame.

"What do you mean?" she asked, in a scared voice.

He had restrained his emotions with an iron hand. Now they burst from his control.

"What do I mean?" he cried, with convulsed features. "Paradoxical as it may sound, I mean that I love you with a tenderness which shudders that harm should come to a hair of your head, and that loving you like this, I am about to blight your life and crush your heart with my own hand! I mean that my soul is being rent in twain by the conflict of all that is pure and holy in my love for you pleading for your restoration unharmed to your home and friends, and all that is ignoble and devilish in my love for you goading me to possess you at all hazards!"

The intensity of his passion was like a vivid gleam of lightning, revealing his dark nature to her in lines of fire. She saw the battling of those forces, as he described it. If she could only stimulate the good!

"Let the noble part of your nature prevail!" she pleaded, with clasped hands. "You say that you love me; and could you destroy me in the same breath?"

"Oh, God! how I love you!" he cried, with hands clasped over his face.

"You will not consummate this terrible wrong? You will return me to my home, and I will bless you with my dying breath!"

"I cannot! I cannot! Oh, heaven! I cannot give you up!"

"See! see!" she cried, her bosom fluttering between hope and despair; "you can take me back, and I will never betray you. Every one thinks you dead. You can go away and begin life anew—a nobler, better life. The consciousness of having resisted this temptation—this one victory of the good—will stimulate you to perseverance in uprightness. Do this noble action! You will never have cause to repent it. You will date your new life from to-day, and bless the inspiration that prevailed over you."

He wrung his hands in agony. He pleaded with her, in almost groveling supplication.

"Florence, listen! I have wealth. I will lavish upon you everything that heart can wish and money can buy. For the rest, I will love you as never before was woman loved. I will be your slave, and in return ask only a smile and the poor privilege of kissing your hand."

"Stop! stop!" she cried. "You know that such a dream can never be realized. The touch of your gold would be like fire. If I could accept it, I should deserve the terrible fate you depict. But you will not overwhelm me with shame and yourself with infamy. You will release me—say it!"

"Never! never! I will bind you to me, and heaven nor hell shall come between us!"

He sat erect, as he gave himself over to the devil in those words. A look of immovable resolve came into the steely glitter of his eyes and settled about his white, set lips.

She threw herself upon her knees before him, and with clasped hands and eyes streaming tears made a last appeal.

"Wait! wait!" she cried. "Do not you see? You can only make me hate you—loathe you—abhor the very sight of you! You can only crush me—make life to me a burden insupportable! If you love me, as you say you do, every moment of your life will be imbibed by an agony of remorse and self-reproach, and you will end by hating yourself and me, as the helpless cause of your misery! See! you need not return with me. You can get out and go to the new life that is before you, and the cabinman will take me home; or you can set me down and I will find my way back alone. Spare me—spare yourself this lifelong wretchedness!"

He cut her short with a wild laugh of abandonment and recklessness:

"Wretchedness?" he repeated. "Oh, no! every moment at your side shall be one of bliss!"

And he snatched her to his breast with passionate exultation.

With a shriek of horror and loathing, terror and despair, she tore herself from his embrace, and shrunk cowering on the back seat of the carriage. Then, with a sudden revulsion of feeling, he covered his face with his hands and groaned:

"My God! what a devil I am!"

From that moment, Florence Goldthorp spoke not another word, but sat shivering in her corner; and any one looking at her cowering, terror-struck attitude and wild eyes might well have believed her a maniac.

Half an hour later, just as the sun was appearing above the horizon, the carriage was driven out of sight behind a deserted log-house that stood a little back from the road. Then Cecil, Florence, and the driver went into the house, to await the fall of night before continuing their journey.

CHAPTER IX.

A TERRIBLE SITUATION.

THE state of mind of a pure and noble woman in the situation in which Florence Goldthorp now found herself may be better imagined than described. But with the failure of all earthly aid, she had yet a resource in God, without whom not a sparrow falls to the ground. It matters not what view we may take of religion; the mere placing herself in an attitude of prayer—the fixing her dependence on a being whom she believed beneficent as well as omnipotent—must of necessity have a tranquilizing effect; and such was its influence upon her in this trying moment. She could not believe that a God of justice and of love would permit the consummation of so fiendish an act.

With her calmer mood came connected reflection. She saw that with her abduction Cecil Beaumont had thrown off the mask, and had no longer any motive for dissimulation. Amid all the perturbation of her soul at the danger that threatened her, the strong current of her love for Frederick Powell asserted itself. Whatever might befall herself she would not lose this opportunity to gain possession of facts which might enable her at some future day to place him fairly before the world—to establish his innocence of the crimes imputed to him. With this in view, she conquered her repugnance to address her persecutor, and said:

"Mr. Beaumont, it might perhaps be deemed excusable curiosity, should I ask how it came about that the world thinks you dead, while in reality you are alive and well?"

"Florence, I will hide nothing from you; since if you escape me I shall not live to receive the punishment that the world would inflict for my crimes. You cannot but know that I purposely let the impression prevail that Frederick Powell had murdered me, in order to secure his death, both to gratify my hatred of him, and to cut him off from the possession of yourself, and you already hate me for it. Therefore I have not even this motive for concealing anything from you."

With this beginning he told her all. During the progress of the cold-blooded narrative, she sat shuddering from head to foot, regarding him with a look in which incredulity almost mastered horror. Her mind could not compass such a depth of villainy.

"Am I not a devil?" he asked, in conclusion. "And yet there is something of good in my love for you. Behold the evidence of it in what it has cost me to wrong you as I am doing."

He stood before her the wreck of his former self. His gaunt and bloodless cheeks, his sunken eyes with leaden rings about them, his trembling frame, all attested the fiery struggle that had been going on within, and would have excited her pity, but for his persistency in sin.

"I gave him over to death as I would shoot a cur; but it is wronging the woman I love that has wrought this change in me."

Florence looked at him now without the manifestation of any kind of emotion.

"There is one other point upon which you may be willing to speak with equal frankness, since there is no motive for reserve. Do you deny plotting to betray Mr. Powell into drunkenness and gambling?"

"No."

"Do you still persist in the assertion that he made out a draft in his father's name?"

"I never made such an assertion."

"We will not quibble upon words, if you please. Did he, or did he not, sign that draft?"

"He never saw it until the day when he was accused of having forged it."

Florence's heart gave a great leap. Something of the old color came into her cheeks and the old sparkle into her eyes.

"He did not make the copies of his father's signature—he did not put them into his desk?"

"I made them and placed them in the desk."

"I knew it."

She spoke with unswerving directness, looking straight into his eyes. He smiled faintly, and replied:

"I knew that you knew it."

"But so long as I could not convince others of it, you did not care?"

"Exactly."

"One other point. Billy Saunderson stole Mr. Powell's keys and gave them into the possession of Tiger Dick?"

"Undoubtedly."

"Billy Saunderson and Tiger Dick are your tools, subservient to your will?"

"Not entirely. There you are a little at fault; but, as you have proved yourself so able a detective, I will not deny you the pleasure of solving that problem also, at any future opportunity you may have."

With these words he rose and left the room, to communicate with the cabinman, who was spreading out their dinner under the shade of a tree at the back of the house.

He had hardly gone from her presence when a sound of wheels approaching the road reached her. Cecil also detected it; and she heard him coming round the house to the door, which was in front, to intercept any meditated flight on her part, and to take precautions against her screaming to apprise the travelers of her distress.

With a bound Florence was out of the house and running toward the road with all her strength, screaming at the top of her voice. Cecil followed with an oath, but checked his pace as the carriage came in sight. It was an old man, who was evidently a clergyman, and his wife. He drew rein in no little perturbation, as he saw a woman running to ward him with wild eyes and streaming hair.

"Oh, save me, sir—save me!" she cried, striving to get into the carriage; but then detecting his office by his dress she drew back, and, looking at him suspiciously, asked: "Are you come to marry us?"

"My daughter, from what do you wish me to save you, and whom are you about to marry?"

Instantly she saw from his benign looks and from his gentle voice that he could not be the wretch of whom Cecil had spoken; and then there was the woman with him, her face expressing motherly anxiety. At sight of her Florence ran round to the other side of the carriage, and seizing her hand and kissing it, began to pour forth her troubles in a confused stream.

"Oh, dear madam, you will not let him keep me, will you? He has stolen me from my home—I thought it was Fred; but it was he—he wrote the note in Fred's name—poor, dear Fred! and he pretended that he had forged his father's name! And when I got the note I went to him, and it was this vile wretch! And he says that he is going to marry me with a villain of a minister whom he has bought with his gold—Oh! Oh! Save me from him! Do not let him touch me! Oh! dear lady, save me! save me!"

And in an agony of terror she leaped into the carriage and clasped the frightened lady about the neck, for Cecil was coming around the carriage to the side on which she stood.

"Poor Mrs. Jones's mind was in a whirl. She looked from the terrified girl in her arms to Cecil. He stood before her with a look of unutterable sorrow in his face, and unshed tears in his eyes. She saw that he was the more composed of the two, and addressed him, as more likely to get a coherent reply from him.

"My dear sir, I am frightened. What can be the meaning of this?"

"Madam," said the arch-hypocrite, with well-simulated grief, "you see in me a man most sorely afflicted. My wife—"

"I am not his wife! Oh! do not believe him! He has not married me yet—indeed he has not! He said that he was going to; and such a wretch! he has bribed him to perform the ceremony whether I consent or not—and I never would! Oh, I hate him! I—"

"Hush! Hush, my child!" said Mrs. Jones, soothingly; and again turning to Cecil: "Will you please to proceed, sir?"

"But do not believe him! Do not listen to him! It is all false! I was engaged to Fred—and he let us all think that he had murdered him; and they tried to hang him; and then he stole me away! Oh, do not let him get me again! Take me home with you! My name is Florence Goldthorp, and I live at C—. Will you take me home? Say that you will, and that you will not give me back to him—he is a murderer!"

And shuddering she buried her face in good Mrs. Jones's motherly bosom.

"Hush! my child; I will do what is right by you. If you will not let this gentleman speak, how can I tell what to think?"

"But I have told you the truth! Oh! believe me!—I have told you the truth! He stole me away from home, and is going to marry me against my will! And I never would marry him! I loathe him!"

At her reference to the murder and lynching, followed by her name and residence, Cecil Beaumont had turned fairly livid, and his heart had stood still; but a glance satisfied him that the minister was ignorant of the occurrence, and he breathed more freely. Now he found opportunity to say:

"She has been that way for a week, madam. She wrings my heart constantly by her wild vagaries. She thinks that I have abducted her, and intend to force her into a marriage repugnant to her feelings. I wanted to keep her at home, but have at last yielded to the painful necessity. You will see by this letter of introduction."

He drew a letter from his pocket and handed it to Mr. Jones. It purported to be from a doctor, addressed to the keeper of a mad-house. The patient named in it was Mrs. Mary Hawkins.

"Ah! poor thing!" said the clergyman, sympathetically, and turned it so that his wife could see.

Florence had listened to Cecil in bewilderment. She saw him hand the letter to Mr. Jones, with eyes slowly distending with some unknown terror. She heard the minister's tone of regret, and saw the sorrowful look that came into his wife's eyes as she feelingly stroked her hair.

"What does he mean?" she asked in a voice suppressed by fear. "What is that letter? Let me see it!"

The minister was about to return it to Cecil but

Florence snatched it from him. She read it—it was only a few lines—and then turned to Mrs. Jones with horror in her eyes.

"Does he mean to say that I am crazy?" she asked—"that I am a Mrs. Hawkins?"

Mrs. Jones kissed her, with tears of sympathy in her eyes.

"My poor darling!" she murmured.

"Stop! stop! Does he say that I am crazy? Is he going to take me to this mad-house?"

"Do not fear. Come, he will take you home."

And she drew her gently toward the side of the carriage. But Florence clasped her about the neck again with frantic energy.

"Oh! you believe him—you believe him! You are going to give me back to him! I will never go! I will die first! I should die with terror if he touched me again! Oh! listen to me! Indeed, indeed, I am not his wife! My name is not Mary Hawkins! Oh! take me home! They will all tell you! Everybody knows me! I live with my uncle! My name is Florence Goldthorp! See! see! here is my handkerchief!"

The thought had come to her like a flash. She snatched the handkerchief from her pocket and held it up in triumph. She thought to annihilate him by that one blow. While she extended it with one hand to Mrs. Jones, she turned upon Cecil with the look of a queen and shaking her finger at him, said:

"Ah! you villain! I've got you now!"

She saw a gleam of malignant triumph for one instant light his eyes with its lurid flame, and then the mask dropped again.

"We have been married only a year!" he said, in a tone as if his heart was breaking.

She heard Mrs. Jones say:

"Poor child!"

Then she turned and saw the unchanged look of compassion on the lady's face.

She was thunderstruck. Then slowly there crept into her mind a terrible suspicion. Was this, after all, the minister whom Cecil had employed; and had they been only playing with her?

With a sinking heart and a quivering lip she took the handkerchief by the corner, and held the mark before Mrs. Jones's eyes.

"Do not you see?" she asked, piteously—"Florence Goldthorp."

"Yes, dear," replied Mrs. Jones, soothingly, in that tone in which we humor the fancies of sick people; and a tear trickled down the good woman's cheeks as she thought to herself: "So young and so beautiful! What a terrible affliction!"

With a quivering moan of despair, Florence mechanically looked at the mark that had failed to affect them. There was something unfamiliar about it, seen even through her blinding tears. She dashed them away, and read:

"MRS. MARY HAWKINS!"

She stared at it wildly. She doubted the evidence of her senses. Was she indeed gone mad? She rubbed her eyes and looked again. There it was, undoubtedly. Then, with a sensation as if the earth was falling away from her, she gazed at the clergyman, at his wife, at Cecil, and again at the handkerchief; and without a sign of warning, she dropped lifeless in the bottom of the carriage.

CHAPTER X.

MARRIAGE WITH A MANIAC.

"Oh! catch her! She has fainted!" cried Mrs. Jones, but too late. Florence lay limp and lifeless at their feet.

With the help of Mrs. Jones, Cecil lifted her in his arms, and as her head rested on his shoulder, kissed her with a hopeless grief that seemed too deep for words.

Tears streamed from good Mrs. Jones's eyes as she murmured:

"Poor thing! poor thing!"

Cecil lifted his eyes, all tear-dim and blood-shot, from Florence to the clergyman's kindly wife.

"I thank you, madam, for your indulgence toward my wife and me. Be assured that your kindness of heart will not be without its reward. Are you going far? Have you yet had dinner? We were just spreading our repast under the trees at the back of the house as you approached. Will you stop and partake with us?"

"Thank you, Mr. Hawkins. We had arranged to take our dinner a little further on. Perhaps our presence might agitate your poor wife, when she returns to consciousness. We leave you, sir, with heartfelt commiseration for your affliction. Good-afternoon."

Then they drove on, and Cecil Beaumont bore his unconscious burden back to the house. But there was no triumph in his look now; it had given place to gloomy despondency.

He laid her down on a bank of turf, and gazed upon her long and sorrowfully. As he sat beside her, his hands resting listlessly in his lap, his head bowed, and that longing, famished look in his eyes, he was a picture of utter wretchedness.

"Oh, God! what a curse is this love of mine!" he muttered. "Why do I not restore her to her home? But when I would give her up, then comes that burning, insane determination to cling to her though my heart endures the tortures of hell at the misery I inflict upon her. It almost seems like a visitation from God in punishment of my perfidy toward Mary—poor girl! how she loves me!—and that He will thwart me in the end. Well, nothing can be worse than what I now suffer. I shall be glad if He takes it out of my hands."

What pen can describe the emotions of Florence Goldthorp, when she awoke from her trance to the realization of her terrible situation? That one glimpse of hope made the night that followed it a rayless void of black despondency. She seemed deserted of God and man. She lay as white, as still as a corpse, in the stupefaction of despair.

With the fall of night, the horses were again attached to the carriage, and Cecil came to her and would have lifted her in his arms; but, shuddering with abhorrence of his touch, she sprang to her feet and entered the carriage unaided.

She saw the futility of resistance then, and would not give him an excuse for taking hold of her; but when near midnight they stopped at another deserted house in the depths of the woods, and she saw, by the light of a lantern, the form of a man standing in the doorway, whose dress was a disgusting mockery of that affected by the clergy, then she clung to the carriage, with a voiceless, agonized prayer to

Heaven for deliverance. She had no hope of earthly or heavenly intervention; her action was merely instinctive.

"Florence!" said Cecil, in a heartbroken tone, "my poor Florence! why struggle against a fate that is inevitable? It cuts me to the soul to see you in such misery—to know that I am the cause—I who love you so? I would restore you to your home—I would give you up, but I cannot! It is our fate; why fight against it?"

Something in his voice chained her attention. Without releasing her hold on the carriage, she turned her head and looked at him. He stood with clasped hands and tearful eyes, a look of pleading and deprecation and sorrowful love on his face.

With a wild thrill it burst upon her that he was insane. Then shrinking, cowering, quivering she hid her face in the curtain of the carriage, chilled to the soul by a new terror.

"Oh! my darling, how I pity you!—how I love you!—how my heart bleeds for you! I loathe myself, as the instrument of your torture, far more than you can loathe me. But I am helpless in the hands of a cruel destiny. What is to be, must be! We can none of us escape it!"

He reached into the carriage and put his arms about her lovingly, tenderly, and drew her toward him. With a gasp, her strength failed her utterly. He gently disengaged her now nerveless hands and lifted her in his arms. She did not resist him. She seemed paralyzed. She only cowered and shivered and gazed into his face as if fascinated.

Slowly he carried her to the house, the "minister" making way to give him admittance. It was an old log-house, long since given over to the spirits of the storm and solitude. A wide fire-place was at one end of the single room, and above it a smoke-blackened mantel-piece of oak now supported the lantern. A rough bench stood against the wall, and upon this Cecil rested himself, holding Florence in his lap. She, like a bird in the toils of a serpent, sat panting, helpless, fascinated by the strange, weird look of compassion on his face, that never changed.

The minister took up his position before them; the cabman and a hangdog-looking fellow who had been in company with the divine, stood a little aloof. The clergyman took from his pocket a greasy, dog-eared prayer-book. He held it in hands that shook with the palsy induced by dissipation. He read it with eyes bleared and bloodshot, looking from swollen and inflamed lids. He pronounced those solemn charges, those holy exhortations, those sacred prayers, with lips all tremulous with unbridled excesses, and emitting at every breath sickening fumes of alcohol.

All through the ceremony Florence sat as impassive as a statue; only when the ring was slipped on her finger a shudder ran through her frame, but she never removed her eyes from his. And Cecil wore such a look of yearning compassion as might have rested on the face of a mother who was forced to look upon her child in agony she could not alleviate. But when the last words were spoken, and the minister closed his book with a careless slam, a look of wild exultation blazed in Cecil's eye and distorted his face; and with a blood-curdling, maniac laugh, he clasped her to his heart, and cried:

"Mine!—mine, for time and for eternity!—mine, beyond the reach of man or God!"

But scarcely were the words out of his mouth, when a pistol-shot rung out on the air, and the ball struck the rude plaster with which the logs were chinked, and scattered it in his face. At the same moment a man stepped across the threshold, and the mocking voice of Tiger Dick said:

"Ah, Beaumont! do not start. It is only a little surprise of mine—a celebration of your nuptials with fireworks, you know."

With a cry, Florence burst the spell that bound her; and tearing herself from the arms of her maniac lover sprung toward the Tiger with extended arms. Was she about to appeal to him for protection? Ah! better to trust herself to the mad love of Cecil Beaumont than to commit herself to the tender mercies of this human vampire!

But before she reached him, Cecil Beaumont's arm is extended, the report of a pistol blends with his wild laugh, and she totters and falls into the arms of Tiger Dick, the red blood trickling from her side over his sleeve.

"Take her so! You are welcome!" he cried; and, with a laugh of triumph and derision, he leaped through the sashless window, before the Tiger, embarrassed as he was with Florence, could return the fire.

Shadow Jim ran to the corner of the house to intercept his flight; but the maniac beat him to the earth with a single blow, and leaping upon one of the saddle-horses which Tiger Dick had brought, spurred out of sight in the darkness.

CHAPTER XI. THE DEAD ALIVE.

THE balmy days went by with healing on their wings for May Powell; and though her heart was left crushed and sore, her body gradually yielded to the influences of nature and recovered from the shock that had prostrated her. One evening she passed, in wan and sad-eyed convalescence, down the garden path to Honeysuckle Bower. Looking out on the placid river, she thought of the evening when Cecil had come to her, and then, as she thought, had gone out to that cruel death at the hands of her brother.

She could scarcely realize it even now, that Cecil was dead—that he lay cold and still in his far-away grave, and that Fred, who had protected her kitten from the cruelty of his playfellows, and had wept with her when she broke her doll—she could scarcely realize that Fred had thrust him from the bluff into the terrible waters, and now fled a branded out-cast.

As she thought and wept, a dark object appeared on the water, moving toward her. She soon made it out to be the head of a man swimming—a man with heavy black whiskers and a face of corpse-like pallor, lighted by sunken eyes of unnatural brilliancy. Her first instinct was to fly; but his voice detained her, though her heart palpitated with apprehension.

"Do not fear, lady," he said, in a reassuring tone. "You are Miss Powell, are you not?"

"Yes, sir," she replied, still trembling.

"I come to you with word of your brother. Can I see you where we will not be overheard?"

He spoke in a guarded tone, glancing about as he walked up out of the water.

There was something familiar in the voice that May could not explain. But he was from her brother; that explained his strange manner of coming.

"You can speak to me here, sir. We are alone. Where is Frederick? Is he well? And has he escaped so that they cannot follow him?"

The man stopped at a little distance from her, as if to reassure her, and said:

"Miss Powell, your brother is the victim of a terrible mistake."

"A mistake? What mistake?"

"You have heard of innocent men being convicted on circumstantial evidence?"

"Innocent?—Frederick innocent? What do you mean?"

"Men supposed to be dead have reappeared, alive and well."

"Oh, sir! pray explain yourself. At what are you hinting?"

"Prepare your mind for a great joy. I repeat, your brother is the victim of a fatal mistake."

"What do you say? Frederick innocent, and—"

"Cecil Beaumont is not dead!"

May sat as still as death for a moment, and then she said, in a dying voice:

"You are mistaken. They buried him more than a week ago."

"That was the mistake. It was not Beaumont."

Again she sat still, this time panting with a wild excitement. She sat and looked at the speaker trying to receive his words into her mind and digest their meaning.

"How do you know?" she asked, presently.

"I have seen him within the hour."

"Take me to him! Where is he? Why did he not come with you?"

She arose and put her hand on the arm of the stranger, gazing into his face with fevered impatience.

"He has suffered. He is much changed. You would scarcely know him."

"Is he ill? What has happened? Oh, sir, take me to him immediately."

"He is as pale and thin and ghastly as I am," pursued the stranger, looking at her sadly.

Now she rose on tiptoe and peered into his face. A cadence in his voice had set her heart to throbbing wildly. The next instant he tore the false whiskers from his face, threw an arm about her, and put his hand over her mouth. It was just in time to check the cry that arose to her lips, as she fainted in his arms.

"Poor thing! poor thing!" muttered Cecil Beaumont, as he laid her down on the grass. "How I have wronged her! She loved me—she loves me still, as few women are capable of loving; and I, fiend that I am, trample her heart ruthlessly under foot!"

Then, with the glitter of insanity glowing in his eyes, he went on:

"Ah! how sad it is to be in the hands of so cruel a fate! Everything that I ever loved—everything that ever loved me—has fallen under the curse!"

With a quivering sob, May Powell came back to life again; and then, with a sound like the cooing of a dove, she nestled in his arms, clinging about his neck, unconscious that her clothes were being saturated by the water that dripped from his garments, only weeping and laughing and kissing him, with little caressing hugs, and repeating over and over again, as if she would never tire of the sound:

"Cecil! Cecil! Cecil! Cecil!"

And Cecil Beaumont held her in his arms and wept over her like a child. His only thought was:

"How I have wronged her!—how I have wronged her! Ah! what a cruel, cruel destiny!"

It seemed as if she would have sat there forever, without a word of explanation, filled, satisfied with the knowledge that he lived—with his arms enfolding her—with his broad breast for her heart to beat against. But he broke the spell.

"May," he said, "I have come back to you, but not to the world."

She started back, and gazed at him, with open-eyed wonder.

"Not to the world?" she repeated. "What do you mean?"

"I cannot explain to you now; but the world must not know for a few days that I am not dead. I have a task to perform. If it were known that I lived—that I am in town—I should be frustrated—my life might yet be in jeopardy."

"Cecil, who is your enemy? Is it that terrible man?—that—that—Tiger Dick? Has he been trying to kill you? Oh! what a wretch! I knew that he was a murderer, that day when I saw him smile."

"Yes, he is at the bottom of it all," assented Cecil, gladly jumping at any solution that would satisfy her curiosity.

"Then why not apply to the police immediately, and have him arrested?"

"I cannot meet him in that way, May. See; here is the mark of his last bullet."

He opened his shirt and showed where a bullet, shot at him from one side, had ranged across his breast, leaving a blue line. She uttered a tremulous cry.

"Oh, Cecil! what can we do for it?"

"Nothing," he replied. "It is not injurious; but it was a narrow escape. May, cannot you hide me for two or three days? I do not know where else to go for security."

"Cecil, where?" she asked.

"I do not know. There must be a room in that big house."

He looked wistfully at the house as he spoke.

May thought a moment, and then the color came into her cheeks.

"Your life depends upon it; every consideration must give way before that," she said, more in apology to herself than to him.

"Yes, my life may depend upon it," he replied, detecting the struggle in her breast between conventional propriety and conscious purity of purpose.

"I know of but one place where you will be secure from prying eyes," she said, looking straight into his face; "but though my conduct will provoke curiosi-

ty the while, it will receive no explanation until you are out of danger. Stay here, until I see if the way is clear to get you into the house."

Then she was gone; and Cecil Beaumont, his nature purged of some of its baseness in the fiery crucible through which he had passed, standing in the shadows that seemed sanctified by her recent presence, bared his head with a reverence for womanhood that his rational moments had never known.

"May," he said, in whispered apostrophe, "in your devotion I see the treasure I have carelessly thrown aside; in your love I recognize a pearl cast before swine! Your love for me blinded you to a fact as patent as day; and now, for love of me, you lay at my feet a woman's dearest treasure—for my sake, freely, unhesitatingly, you incur the risk of compromising yourself in the eyes of the herd who, seeing only through the discolored medium of their own vile natures, discern in fine gold only dross. And I?—I accept it! As if that was not enough, I betray you while accepting it, and make your very nobility of soul subserve the gratification of the basest of passions—revenge!"

"Ah! what a requital! What a devil I am! But I must go on—it is decreed! Oh! the cruel destiny! These hands, how they reek with the blood of my childhood's playfellow!—how they drip and drip with the blood of her whom I had enshrined in my heart of hearts! They will never be clean again, till bathed in the blood of the fiend whose baleful wings, through all these years, have hovered between me and the sunlight of heaven!"

A frenzy was upon him; and he paced the bower like a caged lion, with blazing eyes, white, quivering nostrils, and fever-parched lips.

A step sounded on the walk, and instantly he was calm.

"Come!" said May, and gave him her hand.

Cautiously they approached the house. She led him in at a side door, up a dark staircase, through a corridor, to a room which, from its appointments, he recognized as her boudoir. From this she opened a door that ushered him into her bedchamber.

"Here, Cecil, you will be safe," she said. "Do not go near enough to the window to be seen from the lawn, and I will keep watch in the outer room so that no one can get to you. I will have my meals served in the boudoir, and share them with you. There are some of Fred's—poor Fred's garments, so that you can change your wet clothes immediately."

He stood, as if overpowered, with bowed head and swimming eyes. Then he bent over her hand, and while tears fell upon it with his kisses, he said:

"God bless you, May, and help me! How little deserving of this I am!"

"Hush, Cecil!" she whispered; "I would yield my life for you, if need were!"

A moment she laid her cheek to his, touching her lips with her heart in them, to his neck; and then she pushed him gently into the room and closed the door.

Long she walked the floor of her boudoir in fevered excitement.

"He is alive! he is alive!" she whispered to herself, her face almost luminous with its radiance of love and joy and gratitude. Then the thought that he was the wreck of his former self wrung her heart with a twinge of anguish; but she banished it as ungrateful, after the great mercy of Heaven in sparing his life; and with hands reverently folded on her bosom, she raised her streaming eyes and whispered: "Oh, God! I thank thee! He is alive!"

But her enfeebled frame succumbed at last; and she lay white and still on the sofa, and with her hands before her eyes to shut out everything else from her consciousness, thought of him with her whole soul.

The clock was on the stroke of twelve, when Mr. Powell raised his head from the table, where it had been resting on his arms in painful meditation. Wearily he arose; and as he stood, a man prematurely old through grief, one could see how fearfully the events of the past few weeks had told upon him.

A drunkard, a gambler, a forger, a robber, a murderer!—and now, to crown the catalogue of infamy, he had beguiled from her home the woman he professed to love, and sunk her, too, in the quagmire of his shame! That was the thought that wrung the father's heart and turned his black hairs gray.

But hark! as if in mockery of his grief comes a long, wild laugh of derision. It rises weird and spectral, and dies away in a blood-curdling rattle. He starts and listens. What is it? Again it rises. And now he rushes to the door and up the stairs, and without knocking, bursts into May's boudoir.

She is standing in the middle of the room, as white as any ghost. She raises her hand in a gesture that holds him on the threshold. Again that hideous laugh rings through the house, coming unmistakably from her bedchamber, and covering her face with her hands, she stands shuddering from head to foot.

"What in Heaven's name is it, May?" asks her frightened father, taking her by the arm and shaking her, to rouse her out of the stupor that has fallen upon her.

She looks up at him, with such a look of woe as he has never before beheld.

"Father," she says, "it is Cecil!"

"Cecil?"

He gazes at her as if he thought she had taken leave of her senses.

"He is alive, father, and has come back."

Leaving her, he strides to the bedroom door and throws it open. Cecil Beaumont is sitting upright in bed, just preparing to give utterance to another of those insane laughs. At sight of Mr. Powell a look of terror comes into his face, and he reaches one hand under his pillow. But May darts in past her father.

"Cecil! Cecil! it is papa!"

Instantly he is calm.

"Ah! Mr. Powell! Pardon me, sir; pardon me. I did not recognize you at first. But this is a sad affliction that has fallen upon you, sir. Let me offer you my heartfelt condolence."

"Excuse us a moment, Cecil," says May, with a woman's ready wit; and pushing her father back, she closes the door again.

Then her strength fails, and she sinks to the floor, writhing in anguish of spirit, and moans and sobs as if her heart would break.

"Oh! he will die! he will die! He has come back to us only to die after all!"

With his brain in a whirl, the father lifts her in his arms and carries her to the sofa. She clings about his neck and hides her face in his breast, with an abandon of grief that frightens him into silence and inactivity, while his mind labors to grasp the staggering fact that his eyes have beheld Cecil Beaumont in the flesh. He masters it, at last, and then, like the rolling of a weight from his heart, comes the consciousness:

"FREDERICK IS NOT A MURDERER!"

With feverish eagerness he begins to question his daughter as to how Cecil Beaumont came into his present position. His earnestness forces her out of her grief, and she answers him, at first wildly, then more coherently.

"We must bring relief to him immediately, May," he says, rising.

"But, papa, how can you, without betraying him? He said that his life might depend upon it."

"That was only an insane fancy. At any rate, no danger can reach him here; and he will die, if neglected."

So it was announced to the world that Cecil Beaumont yet lived.

CHAPTER XII.

AN AWFUL PERIL.

TIGER DICK and Shadow Jim walked briskly for two or three blocks, and then entered a pawnbroker-shop. When they reappeared, it was on the next parallel street, and their own pals would not have known them, so completely were they disguised.

They proceeded directly to the stables where Pat Donovan's hack was kept. While they were waiting for a couple of saddle-horses, they passed among the animals as they stood in the stalls, commenting upon them with a manifest knowledge of horse-flesh that engaged the attention of the hostlers, while Shadow Jim surreptitiously took the throat-latch from a halter in an empty stall.

The Tiger, who appeared in the character of an English sporting gentleman, took a sudden fancy to a lithe-limbed hound that had been kept about the stable, and before he left the premises had paid the money that made him the happy possessor of the animal.

At Griggs's Hollow the object of this sudden fancy and purchase transpired. The throat-latch was held to the nose of the intelligent animal, and then he was set upon the track of Pat Donovan's hack. We have seen that they came up with the object of their pursuit just after the consummation of the mockery of a marriage.

When Cecil Beaumont leaped through the window, Tiger Dick let the insensible form of Florence Goldthorp down on the floor, and sprung to the door of the hut.

"Stop him, Jim! Shoot him down! The devil has killed her!" he cried.

But Shadow Jim lay insensible at the corner of the house, while Cecil Beaumont was already in the act of mounting. As he swung into the saddle, Tiger Dick's pistol was discharged, the bullet grazing his breast. With a wild laugh the maniac dug his heels into the flanks of his horse and sped away into the darkness.

Leaving Shadow Jim to take care of himself, the Tiger sprung back into the house with an oath of disappointment and rage. A glance of his experienced eye—practiced in the wild life of the Rocky Mountains—told him that the wound received by Florence was of a very trivial character. Her fainting and the blood trickling over his sleeve had at first deceived him. She had been with her back directly toward Cecil when he fired, and the bullet, striking the steel of her corset frame, had grazed her side, merely abrading the skin along one of the ribs.

She was soon restored to consciousness, and grasped the Tiger's hand in gratitude.

"Oh, sir," she said, "from how horrible a fate you have preserved me!"

"Madam, say no more," said the Tiger, with easy suavity: for he could play the gentleman, when it served his turn. "I am only too happy to have been in time to render you assistance."

"Your coming was most opportune, sir," she said, shuddering at the recollection of her recent peril. "He is a wicked man, who abducted me and was forcing me into a marriage with him, through the instrumentality of this villain here, whom he called a minister."

She turned, but the late officiating clergyman had stepped from the room.

"Hold on here, sport! We'll have further use for you," said the Tiger, leveling his pistol at the cabman, who was on the point of imitating the example of the divine.

The appeal, so forcible urged, was heeded; and offering Florence his arm, the Tiger placed her in the carriage with the grace of an accomplished gentleman, and followed her.

Shadow Jim, who by this time had regained his scattered wits, mounted his horse; and with a quiet intimation to the cabman that it would be quite a pleasant diversion to blow the top of his head off, if he didn't "give 'em a square deal," instructed him to crack up his horses.

A little way up the road they came upon the hound, which, upon seeing the light in the hut, they had tied to a tree, lest he should betray their approach to the occupants.

Some distance further on they turned into a cross-road, and, after a drive of four or five miles, came to a country tavern, where the Tiger procured for Florence that refreshment of which she stood so sadly in need, through excitement and loss of sleep.

"As I presume you do not wish to be the subject of gossip, I will remain silent about the peculiar circumstances in which I met you, and, to save appearances, represent you as my sister, if agreeable to you."

"Thank you, sir. You are very considerate," replied Florence; and by this little piece of adroit maneuvering the Tiger had silenced her. As for the cabman, Dick threatened to blow his brains out at the first symptom of indiscretion, and taking him into the room with himself and Shadow Jim, made him submit to be securely bound, while they slept.

At ten o'clock the next morning they set out again, but went so slowly and made so long a stop in the middle of the afternoon, that it was well along in the night when they passed within a mile of the cave.

The cabman, plied with drugged liquor, had lain in a drunken stupor since sunset; so there was no one the wiser, when the hack was driven off the road among the trees and secured. No one but Shadow Jim saw Tiger Dick lift an insensible form from the carriage, and place it on the back of the horse that had been led since Jim had taken the place of the stupefied driver. Then supporting it in his arms, though the greater portion of the weight was borne by the animal, Tiger Dick walked beside the horse, while Shadow Jim led him, and in this way they reached the vicinity of the cave. But before they drew too near, the Tiger lifted the limp form from the back of the horse, and carried it the rest of the way on foot.

Then Jim went back alone and drove the hack four or five miles back again, over the track that they had come. Here he dragged the driver from his position, and pitched him into a brook that ran beside the road, but drew him out again in time to prevent suffocation. Two or three repetitions of this process completely restored the fellow to consciousness. Then Jim advised him to get up into his seat and "light out! and, if you don't want to get plugged, you'd better not look round till you get to town! And, harkee! my chicken, if you ever go to yarning it about what you've seen in the last forty-eight hours, you'll go to kingdom-come a-sizzlin', you kin bet your bottom dollar! Tell 'em you don't know anything about the other hoss, but that a red-eyed stoker from the bottomless pit, a-breathin' fire an' brimstone, requested you to take charge o' this plug! Now, git!"

Not a little impressed by the somewhat peculiar speech of Shadow Jim, the cabman showed no reluctance to act upon the gentle hint conveyed in his words, and drove off with the horse tied to the back of the vehicle.

When Florence Goldthorp first met Tiger Dick, on the day of the runaway, she had invested him with that halo of chivalry which romance has thrown around the character of Dick Turpin, and of other noted outlaws since his time. The correctness of her estimate of his character was now to be tested.

When she recovered from the effects of the drug which he had administered, she found herself lying on a shakedown of grass covered with a blanket. The chamber was evidently a cave lighted by a torch of resinous wood stuck in the rocky wall. Tiger Dick sat on a stone, beside a larger one, whose flat surface served as a table. Before him were food and wine, evidently taken from the hamper which had been in the carriage.

"Ah! my dear, awake?" he said, seeing her move.

Florence sprung to her feet, and looked around at him. There was a maddening smile on his face. His disguise had been removed, and she recognized him.

"What is the meaning of this, sir? Where are we? And why have you not taken me home?" she asked, with the dignity of a queen, yet with blanched cheeks and heart in her mouth.

"One question at (hic!) a time, my dear," replied the Tiger, smiling beamingly upon her. "In the first place, it means 'at we've put (hic!) up f'r th' night in a hotel where th' (hic!) 'commodations 're ver' lim't-ed—ver' lim't-ed! S-secondly (hic!) we're here—yes'm, we're (hic!) 'ere! W'y didn't I take ye home? (hic!) My dear, thereby hangs a tale—a (hic!) long tale—a ver' long (hic!) tale!"

He closed one eye and smiled at her with a horrible grimace, as his body swayed unsteadily toward her.

"To begin with," he pursued, "that glor' (hic!) beauty, th' made such havoc with s' man' (hic!) 'arts, has foun' 'nother victim in this, your faith—(hic!)—f'l slave! This vuln'r'ble bos'm was not proof (hic!) 'gains' th' arrows 'at dart (t'ic!) f'm y'r starry eyes!—th'at's it; f'm y'r star' (hic!) eyes! Miss Goldthorp, I love you—love you, d' I s—(hic!)—say?—I 'dore you! I wor'sh'p th' groun' b'neath y'r f—(hic!)—feet? Oh! my love! (hic!) one! fly—fly to th' pr'teesh'n (hic!) these arms! Le'm I clasp you! (hic!) this throbbing heart!"

He got upon his feet and reeled toward her with extended arms, his villainous face distorted by a smile that sent the blood in an icy current to her heart. If she had felt terror when in the power of Cecil Beaumont, she now experienced a shuddering, sickening agony of disgust, such as would be inspired by contact with a loathsome serpent.

With a cry she evaded him, and darted into one of the dark galleries that led from the cave. Blindly she groped on, not knowing whither, only seeking to escape the drunken demon who woke the echoes of the horrible place with his hideous laughter. Reeling, stumbling over unevennesses in the floor; falling, bruising and lacerating her hands and knees on the jagged rocks; up and on, to bring up violently against some angle in the passage; on again, ever pursued by that fiendish laughter, that seemed caught up by a thousand tongues; until the wall of her prison suddenly converged, and she could go no further! Then, in her agony and terror, she beat with her feeble hands the impassable barriers of stone, and cried aloud to that God who sometimes seems so deaf to our appeals! Then she thought of her helplessness, should he follow her; and shuddering at the thought of meeting him in so confined a place, and with a horrible, creeping sensation of his arms closing about her, she staggered back, to find him standing at the entrance of the gallery, awaiting her return.

"Ha! ha! ha! Was you flyin' f'm y'r own true love? (hic!) Flor'nce, y'r treat'n' me shameful!—(hic!)—shameful!"

He spoke with a sudden assumption of drunken indignation that was horribly ludicrous. Florence was impressed by it, even in that terrible moment. She tried to spring by him, but he caught her as she passed. The impetus threw him from his feet, and he fell, dragging her to the ground with him. She struggled to her feet again; but he clung to the skirt of her dress, and arose to his knees.

There was a leer of triumph in his eyes, and on his lips oaths, half-angry, half-amused, altogether devilish, as he began to draw her toward him. She struggled wildly, mutely, impotently, in his grasp. Slowly, yet with fatal certainty, he was dragging her within his reach.

Suddenly, in a frenzy of desperation, she sprung upon him, and grasping him by the shoulders, thrust his head against the rocky wall with stunning force. Then, as his grasp relaxed, she tore her dress from his hands and darted away.

She felt a sudden conviction that the gallery near-

est the rock table would lead her to safety. Snatching the torch as she passed, and catching up a pistol that lay on the table, to defend herself, should this passage terminate like the other, she sprang toward the opening.

But there was a sound of rushing feet—a dark form started forth from the gloom, confronting her—thinking of Shadow Jim, she fired, and for the third time within a little over forty-eight hours, swooned dead away! The torch dropped from her nerveless grasp and went out in Cimmerian darkness.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE TIGER CAGED.

WHEN Shadow Jim returned to the cave, after his summary dismissal of Pat Donovan, he found Florence unconscious from the influence of the drug, and Tiger Dick given over to such a fit of conviviality as he had never before seen upon him. Jim, never loth to "place himself on a footing with the gods," joined him; and when he rose to go on a reconnaissance to the city, though his own well-seasoned brain knew no such thing as succumbing, he left the Tiger "on High Olympus."

Shadow Jim felt no qualms of conscience at leaving a helpless girl in the power of the drunken fiend he had just quitted. As he expressed it, "he played his own hand, and calculated to put a head on the sharp that didn't foller suit."

It was well-nigh daylight when he entered the city, and some time after sunrise his new disguise enabled him to pass the stables where Pat Donovan stayed, and here he saw the hound lying in his accustomed place, while a hostler was rubbing down the horse that Cecil Beaumont had ridden.

Then Shadow Jim set himself to ascertain the whereabouts of Cecil. Within an hour he was in possession of the facts that were spreading like wildfire through the city. Then he set out on his return to the cave.

Meanwhile, Charley Brewster had been among those earliest informed of Cecil's return. He burst in upon the detective with the exclamation:

"Draper, you're right; he's alive!"

"Eh? Who's alive? Not—"

"Cecil Beaumont! He is now in Mr. Powell's house."

"The deuce he is!"

The detective stared at Charley in blank amazement.

"He came back last night, and is now in a state of delirium."

"Jim-jams?"

"No; he is insane."

"Fudge! Brewster, that's a lay."

"You wouldn't think so, if you were to see him."

"You have seen him?"

"Yes. He is all the time raving about Tiger Dick and Fred Powell and Miss Goldthorp. Miss Powell is the only one who can keep him quiet. I may as well tell you that she was engaged to him."

"The deuce she was! Why, he ruined her brother, and would have let him hang."

"She hasn't an idea of the sort. She thinks that he has been in some way persecuted by Tiger Dick."

"Fish! Those devils were hand and glove ten years ago. They have been working together in this whole affair, depend upon it. But has Miss Goldthorp returned?"

"No; nothing has been heard of her. Cecil keeps linking her name with Tiger Dick's, all the time warning her of him, or assuring her of protection from him."

"Look here, Brewster, there's some devilment behind this."

"It looks a great deal like it, certainly. He's got a blue line across his breast, that he says is the mark of a bullet fired from Tiger Dick's hand."

"By Jove, Brewster, those devils have had a split, and it's over this girl. I'm going to have another lay for this slippery gentleman, and if I don't bag him this time I'm a long way out of my calculations."

The detective sprung to his feet. Charley was quick to take the infection; and a few minutes later Detective Draper's select force was on its way toward Tiger Dick's retreat, under two very sanguine leaders.

On their way Draper suddenly cried:

"Halt!"

The next instant he fired his pistol and set off on a run, with the exclamation:

"Shadow Jim, by the Almighty!"

Rallied by Charley Brewster, the whole force joined in the pursuit. But Shadow Jim and the detective soon outstripped the rest, and were lost to view in the undergrowth.

As the chase had deviated from a direct line to the cave, Charley gave over the pursuit and led his command straight for the opening, hoping to cut off Shadow Jim. There he was joined by Draper, who was not a little chagrined to have to report that the slippery outlaw had succeeded in eluding him.

"Anyway," said the detective, "we've headed him off; and his running to this hole in the ground shows that here's where we're going to find Tiger Dick. You, Davis and Thompson, stay outside, and shoot the devil if he shows his nose. It won't do to let him escape this time. Now, men, steady, and we'll bag him."

This hunting human game was new to Charley Brewster's experience, and he trembled with excitement, as he followed the detective through the dark and silent passage.

A faint glimmer of light from a dark-lantern thrown on their pathway enabled them to advance without making a noise by stumbling. But it was an unnecessary precaution; for as they turned the first angle a wild burst of laughter came echoing and re-echoing down the gallery, sounding hollow and weird.

"That's our game!" whispered Draper, now advancing more rapidly and with less caution.

Suddenly a woman's cry arose, with terror and rage and despair all blended in one. Charley Brewster sprang by the detective, and turning a second angle came into view of the lighted cave within. Looking down the passage he was traversing, and across the lighted chamber, he saw Florence Goldthorp thrust Tiger Dick against the wall and snatch her dress out of his hands. Then she ran across the chamber, passing from view at one side, but immediately reappearing at the mouth of the gallery,

torch in hand, just in time to meet Charley Brewster.

Up went her hand—there was a blinding flash—a deafening concussion—a scorching puff of smoke and fire in his face—and he staggered back against the detective! Then all was wrapped in Stygian darkness; and Charley Brewster felt a wild thrill of heart, as he thought that he had passed the bound that parts the Here from the Hereafter.

"Lights, men, lights!" cried a voice that sounded far away; and immediately half a dozen dark-lanterns flashed upon the gloom; and Charley Brewster saw dimly the form of Florence Goldthorp lying motionless at his feet, and further in the cave Tiger Dick upon his feet, staring in amazement and terror, completely sobered by this unexpected interruption.

"Stand still there, sport," chuckled the triumphant detective. "I reckon your little game's about played. We've bagged you this time, sure!"

The Tiger made a motion as if to draw a pistol.

"Hands to the front!" rung out the clear, metallic voice. "We've got a masked battery behind here, that'll soon put an end to all your troubles, if you're anxious to go from this weary world of care."

The Tiger desisted from his purpose, blanching, visibly, as the muzzle of a pistol was thrust forward until the light from one of the bull's-eyes fell upon it. While he was in a flood of light, his assailants were wholly invisible to him. He could see nothing but those eyes of flame and the black muzzle of the pistol.

"I guess you've heard of me before," pursued the detective, stepping forward into the range of light. "They call me Jim Farnsworth when I'm at home." "Yes, I've heard enough of you," replied the Tiger, with an oath.

"But not as much as you are destined to hear," said the detective, meaningly, drawing a pair of handcuffs from his pocket.

At this Tiger Dick changed color, and made another motion toward resistance.

"Hands above your head!" cried Farnsworth, as we now know him, bringing his pistol in a line with Tiger Dick's forehead.

With an oath of impotent rage, the outlaw complied. Then the detective stepped forward and disarmed him, following it up by snapping the cuffs on his wrists, and Tiger Dick was a captive.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE TIGER'S LAST CARD.

CHARLEY BREWSTER and detective Farnsworth had the management of a little surprise-party (so they said) at Mr. Powell's residence. Through the influence of Charley, every one was banished from the parlors and the library across the hall, until all was in readiness.

There was an undercurrent of great satisfaction and joy in Charley's bearing that particularly drew the banker out of his grief in spite of himself, and filled him with a vague anxiety not unmingled with an indefinite hope. But when he entered the front parlor, cut off from the back one by the now closed folding-doors, and saw no one there, he turned upon Charley with a look of disappointment and inquiry. May, Mr. Carrington and Mr. Creswell also stood in silent expectation.

"Be seated," said Charley, his face all aglow with suppressed happiness; but there was a tinge of pain, too, as he glanced at May's pale face and unnaturally brilliant eyes—"be seated. My friend here, Mr. Farnsworth, has a story to tell you."

"Perhaps I can produce a substitute, from whose lips the narrative will be more acceptable to you," said the detective; and, rising, he crossed the hall and opened the library door.

There was the sweep of a robe, and then Florence Goldthorp entered, pale, yet radiantly beautiful. Mr. Creswell sprang up and caught her in his arms.

"Why, pet!" he cried, "is it you?—alive and unharmed? Thank God for His great goodness!"

His tears and kisses fell upon her hair, for he loved her like a father.

Next Mr. Carrington arose, and grasped her hands, and holding her at arm's-length, gazed upon her with emotions almost too deep for expression. Then he drew her to him and touched his lips to her forehead.

"I cannot tell you," he said, "how I have mourned Charley's child, during these three terrible days!"

Mr. Powell, too, received her with feeling, for she had loved Fred, and trusted him against hope. And May?—she embraced her and returned her kiss with a strange, shuddering foreboding of evil.

When they were somewhat composed, Florence said:

"Before telling you about myself, I wish to give you a little previous history, which is the real beginning of the whole affair."

Then she related all of Cecil Beaumont's plot, up to that fearful night at Dead Man's Bluff, telling her own deductions, what had been ascertained by detective Farnsworth, and Cecil's own confession to her.

During this recital, May Powell writhed in agony of spirit, but did not interrupt it by word or sign.

"In confirmation of the story thus far," said the detective, "I wish to produce two witnesses."

He stepped into the library and brought forth Tiger Dick and Billy Sanderson, the former in heavy irons and guarded by a policeman on either side. As for the "decoy duck," he had been thoroughly cowed by the fall of his principal, and had confessed everything.

Tiger Dick laughingly confirmed Florence's story, adding some facts which were unknown to her.

"But, dear madam," he added, with unabashed effrontery, "believe me, that my hostility to Mr. Powell arose, more than half, from a conviction that an angel like yourself ought to be saved from such a soft-pated milk-sop. Had not he insulted me in your presence, I might never have thought of injuring him. He picked the trump and I played my hand on it; and as by this time he is food for the crows, I think I've got my share of the tricks."

Florence first crimsoned with indignation, and then paled at the hint of the fate that had overtaken her lover.

"Go on with the business in hand, if you please, Mr. Tiger," said the detective, with a frown. "It seems to me that you are flying the track in these gratuitous remarks."

"Oh, certainly," replied the Tiger, pleasantly; and he then proceeded to relate the blacker plot conceived at Dead Man's Bluff, after the fight.

His auditors listened with horror to the fiendish details. When he came to Fred's exposure to the murderous pursuit of McFarland and O'Toole, the father burst forth:

"My God! and has my wronged boy fallen by the hands of these bloodthirsty assassins?"

"They're old hands at the business, and usually do their work up brown," chuckled the Tiger, enjoying his anguish.

The detective frowned angrily, and said, in a steady tone:

"Mr. Powell, three days ago your son was seen in the streets of St. Louis, but escaped again. What probability is there that those cut-throats were more vigilant than the police force there?"

This was a partial relief; and Florence now resumed the story, narrating her abduction and escape.

It would be hard to describe May's feelings. She sat with her head bowed upon her arms, as they rested on the table, as motionless as a statue.

All the others gathered about Florence, and congratulated her on her providential rescue.

"If dear Fred were only here," she said, while she mingled her tears with theirs, "our happiness would be complete."

"Florence!" came a voice that sounded like a sigh breathing through the room.

She started and looked around, with a quick color in her cheeks.

"That was surely Fred's voice!" she said, in a whisper.

Charley Brewster flung open the folding-doors, and there, in the back parlor, lay Fred on a sofa, pale and thin, yet with a great happiness beaming in his face.

"Fred! Fred! Oh, he is safe!" cried Florence, and with a bound she was at his side on her knees, with his head clasped in her arms, raining tears and kisses on his face.

"Bless you, my darling!" responded the happy lover; "you always loved me! you trusted me through all!"

"Fred!" whispered his overjoyed sweetheart, with her lips to his ear, "you are thin and worn; but I will nurse you—oh, how I will nurse you!"

And she cuddled his head closer and let her happy tears fall on his emaciated cheeks.

"Oh, I am well already, sweet!" he replied. "The very sight of you has cured me."

But others claimed their share of attention, and Florence yielded at last.

"Frederick, my son, can you ever forgive me?" said the father, overcome with remorse and love and happiness.

"It was our very love for you, boy, that made us so hard on you. The enormity of it, in you, crushed us," said the grandfather, in humiliation at his almost fatal mistake.

"Father—grandfather—say no more," replied the generous Fred. "I see how you have suffered. I never knew the depth of your love for me until now. May, have you no welcome for me?"

She stood gazing at him in bewilderment, but at his words aroused herself with a start, and the next moment fell upon his neck in wild hysterics. It seemed as if the floodgates of her soul were opened, so unrestrained was her weeping. And Charley Brewster—his heart was wrung with sympathy for her.

When she was more calm, Fred told how that detective Farnsworth's men had found him by tracking McFarland and O'Toole, fortunately coming up with them at the station, and then following them to their discovery of Fred. They were overpowered, and the wounded Fred put under medical care, and his recovery secured.

But another part of the drama was in progress. Tiger Dick had ground his teeth in impotent rage when he learned of Fred's deliverance from his machinations. Then the detective had prepared to remove him. But a form appeared in the doorway. It was Cecil Beaumont, with haggard cheeks, and the fires of insanity in his hollow eyes.

"Ha! ha! Tiger Dick," he laughed, "you have made a devil of me; take your reward!"

The barrel of a pistol flashed in the light of the chandelier; the hammer descended; but there was no report. With an oath, Cecil Beaumont drew trigger again, with no better success. It had been discovered that he had a pistol beneath his pillow, and lest he should do harm with it, it had been removed; but upon discovering the absence of the weapon, he had raved about it until they had been obliged to restore it, first however taking the precaution to remove the powder and ball from the cartridge, so as to leave it the appearance of being loaded, while it was in reality harmless. Now several of the detective's force threw themselves upon him, and he was secured in irons.

"Well, pard," laughed the Tiger, sneeringly, "we're like a pair of trussed turkeys, eh?"

"Unhand me, villains! Oh, gods! for one grip at his throat!" shrieked the madman, struggling to free himself.

"Cecil! Cecil!" spoke a voice, and a hand was laid on his arm.

"Ah! May, is it you?" he asked, becoming calm in an instant. And then in a hushed whisper, while his eyes glared at the Tiger-like living coals: "May, he must be allied with the devil; I have heard of such things. Did you see me? I fired at him twice. I could not have missed him at such a distance; yet the shots had no effect. And then these fiends seized me and bound me with these rings of fire. Are they creatures of his?"

"Hush, Cecil, hush!" she said, with a sob of anguish.

"My daughter, come away. This is no place for you," said Mr. Powell, taking May sadly by the arm, and regarding Cecil with a shudder.

"Father, do not interfere with me. You do not know what you are doing."

Mr. Powell looked at her in dismay, but there was an unutterable depth of woe in her face that awed him into unquestioning compliance.

"Is that your father, May?" asked the maniac, and without waiting for an answer, addressed him:

"Sir, I do not attempt to extenuate my crime. I have listened and heard it all rehearsed to you by yonder fiend. But do not trust him implicitly. Lis-

ten to my defense. As ever before, he first incited me into the conspiracy against your son. Listen!

"Ages and ages ago, when we were on earth, my restless spirit fell a prey to that excitement that induced men to leave home and everything that they most prized, and go in quest of gold, that yellow gold that turned men's brains. But I did not go alone. I had a cousin. Oh, how I loved him!—loved him, did I say? Ah! he was my other self! They were sisters—his mother and mine—and brought us up in the love which they felt for each other."

"I have said he was my other self. It was literally true in point of physical appearance. We were so like that our nearest friends could distinguish us only by a scar on Tom's lip, the result of an accident in boyhood. But while I was wild and wayward, he was gentle and good. Yet this very difference drew us all the nearer together in our love."

"I could not go without him. I represented to him the marvelous wealth that we might amass in the new Eldorado, where men arose in the morning penniless, and went to bed at night worth millions; I told him of the comforts and luxuries with which he would be able to surround his mother when he returned, a man with his fortune-made, after an absence of two or three years. Then I saw his eyes sparkle and the color come into his cheek, and I knew he would go."

"We went; and there I met yonder demon. From the day his basilisk eyes first rested upon me, I was doomed. They called him King Monte; and in the wild orgies over which he presided, all that was good in my nature was burned out by the liquid hell that I took in at my mouth. Oh! those days of remorse and agony, and those nights of hellish excitement, when I would have staked my soul on the turn of a card! And Tom, he clung to me and pleaded with me, and even wept over my destruction. And this demon sat slowly turning the cards, ever with that fiendish smile on his countenance, ever with his eyes burning into my soul and filling my veins with liquid fire! And day by day the accursed appetite for alcohol grew upon me; and every day saw me more confirmed in that madness which waits upon chance."

"Then, when I was wrecked in body and soul, and a beggar—when I was on the verge of *delirium tremens*, and the very clothes on my back were mine only on sufferance—they had been won—ha! ha! won by yonder smiling fiend, who generously forebore to assert his rights and leave me naked—in such a state Tom came to me, and with tears in his eyes, and adjuring me in the name of the dear ones we had left, begged me to cut loose from the influences that were dragging me to perdition, and go with him. He had found gold enough to make us both rich. It was ready at our hand. We had but to take possession of it, and then return home, with our highest anticipations more than realized. He would share it with me freely; but knowing my weakness, he first exacted a promise of total abstinence from liquor and a renunciation of gambling for once and all."

"Who could have resisted his appeal? I promised. Ah! how light a thing is a promise—a mere breath! Then he took me to an old, abandoned shaft in the mountain, which appeared not to have been visited for years. There he found a *cache* containing gold enough for both our fortunes, and near it lay a skeleton, doubtless the remains of the luckless miner, who had not lived to take away the treasure that he had accumulated."

"Again, how light a thing is a promise!—a spider's web to bind a maniac! With the possession of gold, came again, with power intensified by the very barrier that stood in the way of its indulgence, as rushing waters pile up before an obstruction, the insane longing to again tempt the goddess of fortune. Why multiply words? He found me again at the accursed board. In my madness I had awakened the suspicions of my destroyer touching our discovery of a great treasure."

"Then Tom forced me away. For once his gentle nature, smarting under a sense of wrong and treachery, asserted itself. He reproached me with the folly and ingratitude that would ruin not only myself but him. And then—oh, God!—I struck him. I have told you that I was on the verge of *delirium tremens*; I was crazed with remorse and shame; I hated myself for my baseness; and in my agony I knew not what I did. I struck him; he reeled and fell down, down, into that yawning shaft! Oh, what a look he gave me, as he toppled over into that abyss! It haunted me all through the years of torture that followed; its reproachful eyes looked sorrowfully at me in moments of remorse; its terror-struck face arose amid the demon conjurations of delirium, goading me deeper and deeper into the maelstrom of dissipation in the vain struggle to elude a specter that ever followed."

"Ha! See! 'Tis he! Tom! Tom! you know I loved you! You know that I would have stricken off my right hand before it should have injured you! Forgive me! forgive me, Tom! Do not look at me like that! I tell you it was not I; it was the demon that possessed me! Oh, Heaven! he will not listen to me! Oh! those eyes of fire! how they burn and sear my soul! Take him away! Oh, God! take him away!"

The maniac shrunk, cowering and shivering, with his hands over his eyes.

"Cecil! Cecil!" whispered May, "be calm. He is gone."

The maniac clung to her hand, and, shrinking close to her side, said:

"May, you will not let him come again? You will not let him look at me with those eyes? I did not mean to kill him. You will tell him, May, if he comes?"

"Yes—yes!" whispered the agonized girl, gazing with love and pity and sorrow upon the wreck before her.

Then he resumed his story. "What happened next I do not know; only this demon was hovering about me. He haunted me day and night. His baleful eyes never for a moment relaxed their eager searching in my brain for the secret of my hidden wealth—that gold all reeking with the blood of him whom I loved best of all the world! Waking or sleeping, his fetid breath was ever on my cheek, his ear ever at my lips—waiting, waiting for the secret! And all the time he kept shuffling the cards, and clinking the gold, and luring me into the old snare. And he made the wide

flash and sparkle, until the demon of appetite burst its chains, and in desperation I grasped the cup. Then how he chuckled and laughed! He knew that he had me then. I was in a whirling hell of excitement, and soon sat at the table opposite him. I bet upon one card again and again, doubling the stake every time, determined to force Fortune to my will. But I lost. Every time turned up something else, until he refused to take my word longer. I was mad. I thought that one more chance would surely win. Then he proposed that the stake be my secret. I refused. He charged me point-blank with the murder of my cousin. He saw me cower beneath his eye. Then he proposed that my secret be pitched against his silence. If I won I should go free. If he won, then my secret and half of my gold. Ah! that gold!—that blood-dripping gold! I would have given it all for one moment of peace! We played. I staked all upon the same card for the last time. I lost! Ah! the devil helped his own—his ally won!

"Then he chuckled, he laughed, he taunted me with the blood on my hands—the crimson stain on my soul! He had filled my veins with the fires of hell. My brain seethed and whirled in delirium. Goaded to madness by his sneers and fiendish triumph, I shot him and fled. Ha! ha! how I laughed, as I clutched my gold and thought of him as writhing in the agonies of death!

"But I had not escaped him. His spirit was added to Tom's. The one was an angel, the other a devil. The one looked sorrow and reproach; the other was a frowning Nemesis, ever thirsting for revenge. Together they haunted me by day, and in my sleep they filled my dreams with horror and agony.

"One day, after years of mad revel in the very center of the maelstrom, my evil genius confronted me in the streets of New York, and I knew that my bullet had not done its work. Then I fled, I know not how; for the delirium was upon me, and for weeks I lay just between life and death.

"When reason again asserted herself I found myself watched over by an angel. A Quakeress, they called her, but she will ever be an angel to me. She drew my feet from the tangled way, and I resolved to begin life anew. When I was healed I came to you, and you know how well I kept my resolve. I did keep it, until an evil hour drew me into speculation in grain—that other and respectable form of gambling. Then, when the firm ground of principle and uprightness was sinking beneath me, this demon again found me out—"

"To claim, at last, his long-deferred revenge!" It was Tiger Dick's voice that rung through the room in clarion tones. He had watched his opportunity and snatched a pistol with his manacled hands. A sharp report blended with his words; and as he was borne to the ground by the detective's force who threw themselves upon him, Cecil Beaumont reeled and fell upon his face, stone dead, with a bullet through his heart!

A woman's cry arose amid the confusion of exclamations. May Powell gazed for a moment in stunned bewilderment, and then fell across the body of the man who had injured her so deeply—upon whom she had lavished all the wealth of her heart!

Charley Brewster sprang forward and lifted her in his arms, and with a sinking heart and swimming brain bore her to her chamber. A thin stream of blood issued from between her lips and stained her pillow—she had ruptured a blood-vessel.

Frantically he fled down the stairs and out of the house for a doctor; but it was of no avail. She lay upon her pillow like a broken lily. Her father held her hand. She pressed it, and looked as if she wished to speak. He bent his ear to her lips and caught the whisper:

"Father, I loved him!" Then her grasp relaxed, and she was free from her sorrow.

Detective Farnsworth finished the interrupted story, telling how the generous Tom, forgiving all his wrongs, had gone in search of Cecil (whose real name was Ernest Elroy) in order to relieve the anxiety of a heartbroken mother. The detective was after Tiger Dick on account of a murder which had forced him to fly from California. Farnsworth and Tom Tracy had been in communication with each other; and when the latter ran across the Tiger he telegraphed for the detective, who arrived only to find his colleague buried in the place of the cousin of whom he was in search.

A long line of carriages wound through the cemetery, and May Powell, the loving and wronged, was laid in her peaceful rest; and, as the man of God said, in a solemn tone: "Earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust!" and the clouds fell upon the coffin-lid, Charley Brewster covered his white face with his hands, with a feeling of utter desolation and awe.

Afterward, when a marble shaft pointed heavenward above the loved remains, Fred and Florence stood beside it.

"Florence," he said, "I see in this the fruits of my sin. But for my weakness, all this trouble could not have come upon us, and she would still be among us."

"Hush, Fred," she replied; "we are all in His hands. We cannot retrieve the past by useless reprimands."

"No; but we may shape the future. And here I promise you that never while life lasts shall another drop of liquor pass my lips."

She looked up at him with a sudden radiance, and as she pressed his arm, said:

"God has answered my prayer!"

Tiger Dick was taken back to the scene of his early crime, and there paid the penalty. His accomplices, McFarland and O'Toole, ended their career with that relic of barbarism, a confession from the scaffold, while the "decoy duck" was given ample opportunity to meditate on the way of the transgressor behind the bars. Jimmy Duff still "slings the whisky" at his "end of the shop," but a new man "manipulates the pasteboards" in the place of Tiger Dick. As for Shadow Jim, his subtlety enabled him to elude pursuit; and after following the fortunes of Tiger Dick to their fall, he "went West," to find a fertile field for the exercise of his peculiar genius in the checker life of the Rocky Mountains, where he put into practice much that he had learned from the experience of his fallen master.

It is a year since last we saw our friends. The organ is filling the brilliantly-lighted and densely-thronged edifice with softest music. There is a rustle of satin, and the bridal cortege passes up the aisle to the altar. Charley Brewster is groomsman, with a half sigh of tender melancholy as his thoughts go out to May. Mr. Carrington gives away the bride. He claims it as his right, his last act of affection for the Charley of his boyhood's friendship. Mr. Powell looks on, proud in his son, and happy in the daughter he is giving him.

The organ bursts into the glad peal of the wedding march, and Fred and Florence have found recompense for all their sufferings.

THE END.

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